MARCH

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THE saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edited by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

Spirit of the Black Hawk
by SAX ROHMER

Bait for a Man-Trap
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

Blood-Money
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Two Against the Terror
by CORNELL WOOLRICH

and other stories

The ***saint*** *and—*
THE SMART DETECTIVE
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Some time ago, as my mind was wandering idly around nowhere, as it often does, it suddenly occurred to it to wonder, for no reason at all, what Sax Rohmer had in mind when he named his famous master villain Fu Manchu.

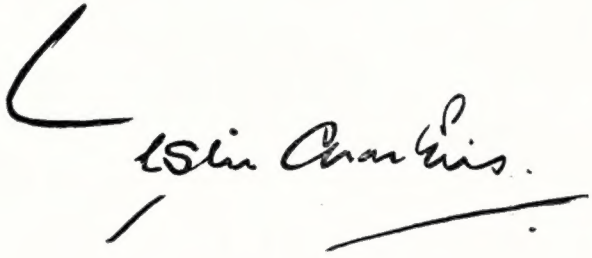
I have been quizzed too often myself about what made me hit on the names "Simon Templar" and "The Saint" to be willing to inflict the same martyrdom on Mr Rohmer, even if it had been possible. But since he passed on a few years ago to whatever Valhalla there may be for writers, I did not even have to fight a temptation. So instead of writing and asking him the silly question, I had to attempt some research of my own.

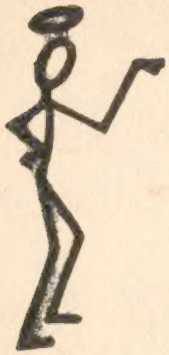
The Manchus, of course, were an Asian tribe who took over a corner of the continent which naturally became known as Manchuria, where they established a dynasty in 1644. It is worth noting that as a race they were tall, slender, well-formed, and did *not* have slanting eyes. "Manchu", then, is simply a proper name that might be compared with "Scott", or if you like with "Tudor", a dynasty which reigned in England about the same time.

The word "Fu", however, is much more difficult. Since Chinese is a monosyllabic language, and the number of possible monosyllables is somewhat limited, they have to make the same monosyllable serve several different purposes, distinguishing the meanings by the tone in which they are spoken. Thus "Fu" can mean, according to how you say it—

1: with a level intonation: *man* or *husband.*
2: with a rising intonation: *fortune* or *happiness.*
3: with a sharply rising inflection: *prefecture.*
4: with a downward inflection: *rich.*

At this point scholarship is stymied, without knowing how Mr Rohmer himself pronounced the name. Perhaps he knew this, and counted on that gimmick to preserve his mystery. It seems a pity, after all, that it is now too late to ask him. Unless some spiritualist medium can send us a tape recording of Mr Rohmer's disembodied voice, the answer is open to anyone's guess. I only feel reasonably certain that the third intonation is quite improbable.





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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 20

Printed in Great Britain by Morrison & Gibb Limited London and Edinburgh

The Smart Detective
by LESLIE CHARTERIS .. 2

An Editoral Aside
by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON 19

Spirit of the Black Hawk
by SAX ROHMER 20

Bait for a Man-Trap
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN 31

Blood Money
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM.. 44

Two Against the Terror
by CORNELL WOOLRICH.. .. 58

The Vicar of Hell
by EDWARD D. HOCH 79

Proof Positive
by DONALD A. YATES 101

Land of the Vedas
by LETICIA V. RAMOS 106

The Square Root of Death
by ED LACY 112

The Mirror of Yin Tang
by CHARLOTTE and DAN ROSS 124

THE SAINT AND—

THE SMART DETECTIVE

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

INSPECTOR CORRIO was on the carpet. This was a unique experience for him, for he had a rather distinguished record on the Criminal Investigation Department. While he had made comparatively few sensational arrests, he had acquired an outstanding reputation in the field of tracing stolen property, and incidentally in pursuit of this speciality had earned a large number of insurance company rewards which might have encouraged the kind-hearted observer to list a very human jealousy among the chief causes of his unpopularity —he was a very smug man about his successes, and he had other vanities which were even less calculated to endear him to the other detectives whom his inspired brilliance had more than once put in the shade.

None of these things, however, were sufficient to justify his immediate superiors in administering the official flattening which they had long been yearning to bestow; and it was with some pardonable glow

From *The Happy Highwayman*. © 1933 by Leslie Charteris.

of satisfaction that Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, who was as human as anyone else if not more so, had at last found the adequate excuse for which his soul had been pining wistfully for many moons.

For at last Inspector Corrio's smug zeal had over-reached itself. He had made an entirely gratuitous, uncalled for, and unauthorized statement to a writer on the *Bulldog* which had been featured under two-column headlines and decorated with Inspector Corrio's favourite photograph of himself on the first inside sheet of that enterprising but sensation-loving weekly.

This copy of the paper lay on Mr. Teal's desk while he spoke his mind to his subordinate, and he referred to it several times for the best quotations which he had marked off in blue pencil in preparation for the interview.

One of these read:

> If you ask me why this man Simon Templar was ever allowed to come back to England, I can't tell you. I don't believe in idealistic crooks any more than I believe in reformed crooks, and the Department has got enough work to do without having any more troubles of that kind on its hands. But I can tell you this. There have been a lot of changes in the system since Templar was last here, and he won't find it so easy to get away with his tricks as he did before.

Teal read out this and other extracts in his most scorching voice, which was a very scorching voice when he put his heart into it.

"I hadn't heard the news about your being appointed Police Commissioner," Teal said heavily. "But I'd like to be the first to congratulate you. Of course a gentleman with your education will find it a pretty soft job."

Inspector Corrio shrugged his shoulders sullenly. He was a dark and rather flashily good-looking man who obviously had no illusions about the latter quality, with a wispy moustache and the slimmest figure consistent with the physical requirements of the Force.

"I was just having a chat with a friend," he said. "How was I to know he was going to print what I said? I didn't know anything about it until I saw it in the paper myself."

Teal turned to page sixteen and read from another of his blue-pencilled panels:

> Inspector Corrio is the exact reverse of the popular conception of a detective. He is a slender well-dressed man who looks rather like Clark Gable and might easily be mistaken for an idol of the silver screen.

"You didn't know that he'd say that either, did you?" Teal inquired in tones of acid that would have seared the skin of a rhinoceros.

Inspector Corrio's face reddened. He was particularly proud of his secretaryship of the Ponder's End Amateur Players, and he had never been able to see anything humorous in his confirmed conviction that his destined home was in Hollywood and that his true vocation was that of the dashing hero of a box-office-shattering series of romantic melodramas.

Having dealt comprehensively with these lighter points, Mr. Teal opened his shoulders and proceeded to the meatier business of the conference. In a series of well chosen sentences, he went on to summarize his opinion of Inspector Corrio's ancestry, past life, present value, future prospects, looks, clothes, morals, intelligence and assorted shortcomings, taking a point of view which made up in positiveness and vigour for anything which it may have lacked in absolute impartiality.

"And understand this," he concluded. "The Saint hasn't come home to get into any trouble. I know him and he knows me, and he knows me too well to try anything like that. And what's more, if anybody's got to take care of him I can do it. He's a grown-up proposition, and it takes a grown-up detective to look after him. And if any statements have to be made to the papers about it, I'll make them."

Corrio waited for the storm to pass its height, which took some time longer.

"I'm sure you know best, sir—especially after the way he's often been able to help you," he said humbly, while Teal glared at him speechlessly. "But I have a theory about the Saint."

"You have a what?" repeated Mr. Teal, as if Corrio had uttered an indecent word.

"A theory, sir. I think the mistake that's been made all along is in trying to get something on the Saint *after* he's done a job. What we ought to do is pick out a job that he looks likely to do, watch it, and catch him red-handed. After all, his character is so well known that any real detective ought to be able to pick out the things that would interest him with his eyes shut. There's one in that paper on your desk—I noticed it this morning."

"Are you still talking about yourself?" Teal demanded unsympathetically. "Because if so——"

Corrio shook his head.

"I mean that man Oppenheim who owns the sweat shops. It says in the paper that he's just bought the Vanderwoude emerald collection for a quarter of a million pounds to give to his daughter for a wedding

present. Knowing how Oppenheim got his money and knowing the Saint's line, it's my idea that the Saint will try to do something about those jewels——"

"And try something so feeble that even a fairy like you could catch him at it," snarled Mr. Teal discouragingly. "Go back and do your detecting at Ponder's End, Corrio—I hear there's a bad ham out there that they've been trying to find for some time."

If he had been less incensed with his subordinate, Mr. Teal might have perceived a germ of sound logic in Corrio's theory, but he was in no mood to appreciate it. Two days later he did not even remember that the suggestion had been made; which was an oversight on his part, for it was at that time that Simon Templar did indeed develop a serious interest in the unpleasant Mr. Oppenheim.

This was because Janice Dixon stumbled against him late one night as he was walking home in the general direction of Park Lane through one of the dark and practically deserted streets of Soho. He had to catch her to save her from falling.

"I'm sorry," she muttered.

He murmured some absent-minded commonplace and straightened her up, but her weight was still heavy on his hand. When he let her go she swayed towards him and clung on to his arm.

"I'm sorry," she repeated stupidly.

His first thought was that she was drunk, but her breath was innocent of the smell of liquor. Then he thought the accident might be only the excuse for a more mercenary kind of introduction; but he saw that her face was not made up as he would have expected it to be in that case. It was a pretty face, but so pale that it looked ghostly in the semi-darkness between the far-spaced street lamps; and he saw that she had dark circles under her eyes and that her mouth was without lipstick.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"No—it's nothing. I'll be all right in a minute. I just want to rest."

"Let's go inside somewhere and sit down."

There was an all-night snack bar on the corner, and he took her into it. It seemed to be a great effort for her to walk, and another explanation of her unsteadiness flashed into his mind. He sat her down at the counter and ordered two cups of coffee.

"Would you like something to eat with it?"

Her eyes lighted up, and she bit her lip.

"Yes. I would. But—I haven't any money."

"I shouldn't worry about that. We can always hold up a bank." The Saint watched her while she devoured a sandwich, a double order

of bacon and eggs, and a slice of pie. She ate intently, quickly, without speaking. Without seeming to stare at her, his keen blue eyes took in the shadows under her cheek bones, the neat patch on one elbow of the cheap dark coat, the cracks in the leather of shoes which had long since lost their shape.

"I wish I had your appetite," he said gently, when at last she had finished.

She smiled for the first time, rather faintly.

"I haven't had anything to eat for two days," she said. "And I haven't had as much to eat as this all at once for a long time."

Simon ordered more coffee, and offered her a cigarette. He put his heels up on the top rung of his stool and leaned his elbows on his knees. She told him her name, but for the moment he didn't answer with his own.

"Out of a job?" he asked quietly.

She shook her head.

"Not yet."

"You aren't on a diet by any chance, are you?"

"Yes. A nice rich diet of doughnuts and coffee, mostly." She smiled rather wearily at his puzzlement. "I work for Oppenheim."

"Doesn't he pay you?"

"Oh, yes. But maybe you haven't heard of him. I'm a dressmaker. I work with fifty other girls in an attic in the East End, making hand-made underwear. We work ten hours a day, six days a week, sewing. If you're clever and fast you can make two pieces in a day. They pay you one shilling apiece. You can buy them in Brompton Road for a pound or more, but that doesn't do us any good. I made twelve shillings last week, but I had to pay the rent for my room."

It was Simon Templar's first introduction to the economics of the sweat shop; and hardened as he was to the ways of chisellers and profiteers, the cold facts as she stated them made him feel slightly sick at his stomach. He realized that he had been too long in ignorance of the existence of such people as Mr. Oppenheim.

"Do you mean to say he gets people to work for him on those terms?" he said incredulously. "And how is it possible to live on twelve shillings a week?"

"Oh, there are always girls who'll do it if they can't get anything else. I used to get three pounds a week doing the same work in Kensington, but I was ill for a couple of weeks and they used it as an excuse to let me go. I didn't have any job at all for three months, and twelve shillings a week is better than nothing. You learn how to live on it. After a while you get used to being hungry; but when you have to

buy shoes or pay a dentist's bill, and the rent piles up for a few weeks, it doesn't do you any good."

"I seem to have heard of your Mr. Oppenheim," said the Saint thoughtfully. "Didn't he just pay a quarter of a million pounds for a collection of emeralds?"

Her lips flickered cynically.

"That's the man. I've seen them, too—I've been working on his daughter's trousseau because I've got more experience of better class work than the other girls, and I've been going to the house to fit it. It's just one of those things that makes you feel like turning communist sometimes."

"You've been in the house, have you?" he said, even more thoughtfully. "And you've seen these emeralds?" He stopped himself, and drew smoke from his cigarette to trickle it thoughtfully back across the counter. When he turned to her again, his dark reckless face held only the same expression of friendly interest that it had held before. "Where are you going to sleep tonight?"

She shrugged.

"I don't know. You see, I owe three weeks' rent now, and they won't let me in until I pay it. I expect I'll take a stroll down to the Embankment."

"It's healthy enough, but a bit draughty." He smiled at her suddenly, with disarming frankness. "Look here, what would you say if I suggested that we wander around to a little place close by here where I can get you a room? It's quiet and clean, and I don't live there. But I'd like to do something about you. Stay there tonight and meet me for dinner tomorrow, and let's talk it over."

She met him the following evening; and he had to do very little more than keep his ears open to learn everything that he wanted to know.

"They're in Oppenheim's study—on the first floor. His daughter's room is next door to it, and the walls aren't very thick. He was showing them to her yesterday afternoon when I was there. He has a big safe in the study, but he doesn't keep the emeralds in it. I heard him boasting about how clever he was. He said, 'Anybody who came in looking for the emeralds would naturally think they'd be in the safe, and they'd get to work on it at once. It'd take them a long time to open it, which would give us plenty of chances to catch them; but anyhow they'd be disappointed. They'd never believe that I had a quarter of a million pounds' worth of emeralds just tucked away behind a row of books on a shelf. Even the man from the detective agency doesn't know it—he thinks the safe is what he's got to look after.' "

"So they have a private detective on the job, do they?" said the Saint.

"Yes. A man from Ingerbeck's goes in at seven o'clock every evening and stays till the servants are up in the morning. The butler's a pretty tough-looking customer himself, so I suppose Oppenheim thinks the house is safe enough in his hands in the daytime. . . . Why do you want to know all this?"

"I'm interested."

She looked at him with an unexpected clearness of understanding.

"Is that what you meant when you said you'd like to do something about me? Did you think you could do it if you got hold of those emeralds?"

The Saint lighted a cigarette with a steady and unhurried hand, and then his blue eyes came back to her face for a moment before he answered with a very quiet and calculating directness.

"That was more or less my idea," he said calmly.

She was neither shocked nor frightened. She studied him with a sober and matter-of-fact attention as if they were discussing where she might find another job, but a restrained intenseness with which he thought he could sympathize came into her voice. She said: "I couldn't call anybody a criminal who did that. He really deserves to lose them. I believe I'd be capable of robbing him myself if I knew how to go about it—have you ever done anything like that before?"

"I have had a certain amount of experience," Simon admitted mildly. "You may have read about me. I'm called the Saint."

"You? You're pulling my leg." She stared at him, and the amused disbelief in her face changed slowly into a weakening incredulity. "But you might be. I saw a photograph once. . . . Oh, if you only were! I'd help you to do it—I wouldn't care what it cost."

"You can help me by telling me everything you can remember about Oppenheim's household and how it works."

She had been there several times; and there were many useful things she remembered, which his skilful questioning helped to bring out. They went down into the back of his mind and stayed there while he talked about other things. The supremely simple, obvious, and imperfectible solution came to him a full two hours later, when they were dancing on a small packed floor off Shaftesbury Avenue.

He took her back to their table as the three-piece orchestra expired, lighted a cigarette, and announced serenely:

"It's easy. I know just how Comrade Oppenheim is going to lose his emeralds."

"How?"

"They have a man in from Ingerbeck's at night, don't they? And he has the run of the place while everybody else is asleep. They give him breakfast in the morning when the servants get up, and then he takes a cigar and goes home. Well, the same thing can happen just once more. The guy from Ingerbeck's comes in, stays the night, and goes home. Not the usual guy, because he's sick or been run over by a truck or something. Some other guy. And when this other guy goes home, he can pull emeralds out of every pocket."

Her mouth opened a little.

"You mean you'd do that?"

"Sure. Apart from the fact that I don't like your Mr. Oppenheim, it seems to me that with a quarter of a million's worth of emeralds one could do a whole lot of amusing things which Oppenheim would never dream of. To a bloke with my imagination——"

"But when would you do it?"

He looked at his watch mechanically.

"Eventually—why not now? Or at least this evening." He was almost mad enough to consider it; but he restrained himself. "But I'm afraid it might be asking for trouble. It'll probably take me a day or two to find out a few more things about this dick from Ingerbeck's, and then I'll have to get organized to keep him out of the way on the night I want to go in. I should think you could call it a date for Friday."

She nodded with a queer childish gravity.

"I believe you'd do it. You sound very sure of everything. But what would you do with the emeralds after you got them?"

"I expect we could trade them in for a couple of hot dogs—maybe more."

"You couldn't sell them."

"There are ways and means."

"You couldn't sell stones like that. I'm sure you couldn't. Everything in a famous collection like that would be much too well known. If you took them into a dealer he'd recognize them at once, and then you'd be arrested."

The Saint smiled. It has never been concealed from the lynx-eyed student of these chronicles that Simon Templar had his own very human weaknesses; and one of these was a deplorable lack of resistance to the temptation to display his unique knowledge of the devious ways of crime, like a pedlar spreading his wares in the market-place, before a suitably impressed and admiring audience.

"Not very far from here, in Bond Street," he said, "there's a little bar where you can find the biggest fence in England any evening between six and eight o'clock. He'll take anything you like to offer him across

the table, and pay top prices for it. You could sell him the Crown Jewels if you had them. If I borrow Oppenheim's emeralds on Friday night I'll be rid of them by dinner time Saturday, and then we'll meet for a celebration and see where you'd like to go for a holiday."

He was in high spirits when he took her home much later to the lodging house where he had found her a room the night before. There was one virtue in the indulgence of his favourite vice; talking over the details of a coup which he was freshly planning in his mind helped him to crystallize and elaborate his own ideas, gave him a charge of confidence and optimistic energy from which the final strokes of action sprung as swiftly and accurately as bullets out of a gun. When he said good-night to her he felt as serene and exhilarated in spirit as if the Vanderwoude emeralds were already his own. He was in such good spirits that he had walked a block from the lodging house before he remembered that he had left her without trying to induce her to take some money for her immediate needs, and without making any arrangement to meet her again.

He turned and walked back. Coincidence, an accident of time involving only a matter of seconds, had made incredible differences to his life before: this, he realized later, was only another of those occasions when an over-worked guardian angel seemed to play with the clock to save him from disaster.

The dimly lighted desert of the hall was surrounded by dense oases of potted palms, and one of these obstructions was in a direct line from the front door, so that anyone who entered quietly might easily remain unnoticed until he had circumnavigated this clump of shrubbery. The Saint, who from the ingrained habit of years of dangerous living moved silently without conscious effort, was just preparing to step around this divinely inspired decoration when he heard someone speaking in the hall and caught the sound of a name which stopped him dead in his tracks. The name was Corrio. Simon stood securely hidden behind the fronds of imported vegetation, and listened for as long as he dared to, some of the most interesting lines of dialogue which he had ever overhead. When he had heard enough, he slipped out again as quietly as he had come in, and went home without disturbing Janice Dixon. He would get in touch with her the next day: for the moment he had something much more urgent to occupy his mind.

It is possible that even Inspector Corrio's smugness might have been shaken if he had known about this episode of unpremeditated eavesdropping, but this unpleasant knowledge was hidden from him. His elastic self-esteem had taken no time at all to recover from the effects of Teal's reprimand; and when Mr. Teal happened to meet

him on a certain Friday afternoon he looked as offensively sleek and self-satisfied as he had always been. It was beyond Teal's limits of self-denial to let the occasion go by without making the use of it to which he felt he was entitled.

"I believe Oppenheim has still got his emeralds," he remarked, with a certain feline joviality.

Inspector Corrio's glossy surface was unscratched.

"Don't be surprised if he doesn't keep them much longer," he said. "And don't blame me if the Saint gets away with it. I gave you the tip once, and you wouldn't listen."

"Yes, you gave me the tip," Teal agreed benevolently. "When are you going out to Hollywood to play Sherlock Holmes?"

"Maybe it won't be so long now," Corrio said darkly. "Paragon Pictures are pretty interested in me—apparently one of their executives happened to see me playing the lead in our last show at the Ponder's End Playhouse, and they want me to take a screen test."

Mr. Teal grinned evilly.

"You're too late," he said. "They've already made a picture of *Little Women*."

He had reason to regret some of his jibes the next morning, when news came in that every single one of Mr. Oppenheim's emeralds had been removed from its hiding place and taken out of the house, quietly and without any fuss, in the pockets of a detective of whom the Ingerbeck agency had never heard. They had, they said, been instructed by telephone that afternoon to discontinue the service, and the required written confirmation had arrived a few hours later, written on Mr. Oppenheim's own flowery letterhead and signed with what they firmly believed to be his signature; and nobody had been more surprised and indignant than they were when Mr. Oppenheim, on the verge of an apoplectic fit, had rung up Mr. Ingerbeck himself and demanded to know how many more crooks they had on their payroll and what the blank blank they proposed to do about it. The impostor had arrived at the house at the usual hour in the evening, explained that the regular man had been taken ill, and presented the necessary papers to accredit himself; and he had been left all night in the study, and let out at breakfast time according to the usual custom. When he went out he was worth a quarter of a million pounds as he stood up—he was, according to the butler's rather hazy description, a tallish man with horn-rimmed glasses and a thick crop of red hair.

"That red hair and glasses is all nonsense," said Corrio, who was in Chief Inspector Teal's office when the news came in. "Just an ordinary wig and a pair of frames from any opticians. It was the Saint

all right—you can see his style right through it. What did I tell you?"

"What the devil do you think you can tell *me*?" Teal roared back at him. Then he subdued himself. "Anyway, you're crazy. The Saint's out of business."

Corrio shrugged.

"Would you like me to take the case, sir?"

"What, you?" Mr. Teal disrobed a wafer of chewing gum with the same distaste with which he might have undressed Inspector Corrio. "I'll take the case myself." He glowered at Corrio thoughtfully for a moment. "Well, if you know so much about it you can come along with me. And we'll see how clever you are."

It was a silent journey, for Teal was too full of a vague sort of wrath to speak, and Corrio seemed quite content to sit in a corner and finger his silky moustache with an infuriatingly tranquil air of being quite well satisfied with the forthcoming opportunity of demonstrating his own brilliance.

In the house they found a scene of magnificent confusion. There was the butler, who seemed to be getting blamed for having admitted the thief; there was a representative of Ingerbeck's, whose temper appeared to be fraying rapidly under the flood of wild accusations which Oppenheim was flinging at him; there was a very suave and imperturbable official of the insurance company which had covered the jewels; and there was Mr. Oppenheim himself, a short, fat yellow-faced man, dancing about like an agitated marionette, shaking his fists in an ecstasy of rage, screaming at the top of his voice, and accusing everybody in sight of crimes and perversions which would have been worth at least five hundred years on Dartmoor if they could have been proved. Teal and Corrio had to listen while he unburdened his soul again from the beginning.

"And now vat you think?" he wound up, "these dirty crooks, this insurance company vat takes all my money, they say they don't pay anything. They say they repudiate the policy. Just because I tried to keep the emeralds vere they couldn't be found, instead of leaving them in a save vat anyone can open——"

"The thing is," explained the official of the insurance company, with his own professional brand of unruffled unctuousness, "that Mr. Oppenheim has failed to observe the conditions of the policy. It was issued on the express understanding that if the emeralds were to be kept in the house, they were to be kept in this safe and guarded by a detective from some recognized agency. Neither of these stipulations has been complied with, and in the circumstances——"

"It's a dirty svindle!" shrieked Oppenheim. "Vat do I care about

your insurance company? I vill cancel all my policies. I buy up your insurance company and throw you out in the street to starve. I offer my own reward for the emeralds. I vill pay a hundred—I mean five thousand pounds to the man who brings back my jewels!"

"Have you put that in writing yet?" asked Inspector Corrio quickly.

"No. But I do so at vonce. Bah! I vill show these dirty double-crossing crooks——"

He whipped out his fountain pen and scurried over to the desk.

"Here, wait a minute," said Teal, but Oppenheim paid no attention to him. Teal turned to Corrio. "I suppose you have to be sure of the reward before you start showing us how clever you are," he said nastily.

"No, sir. But we have to consider the theory that the robbery might have been committed with that in mind. Emeralds like those would be difficult to dispose of profitably—I can only think of one fence in London who'd handle a package of stuff like that."

"Then why don't you pull him in?" snapped Teal unanswerably.

"Because I've never had enough evidence. But I'll take up that angle this afternoon."

He took no further part in the routine examinations and questionings which Teal conducted with dogged efficiency, but on the way back to Scotland Yard he pressed his theory again with unusual humility.

"After all, sir, even if this isn't one of the Saint's jobs, whoever did it, they're quite likely to deal with this chap I've got in mind, and we aren't justified in overlooking it. I know you don't think much of me, sir," said Corrio with unwonted candour, "but you must admit that I was right a few days ago when you wouldn't listen to me, and now I think it'd be only fair for you to give me another chance."

Almost against his will, Teal forced himself to be just.

"All right," he said grudgingly. "Where do we find this fence?"

"If you can be free about a quarter to five this afternoon," said Corrio, "I'd like you to come along."

Simon Templar walked north along Bond Street. He felt at peace with the world. At such times as this he was capable of glowing with a vast and luxurious contentment, the same deep and satisfying tranquillity that might follow a perfect meal eaten in hunger or the drinking of a cool drink at the end of a hot day. As usually happened with him, this mood had made its mark on his clothes; and he was a very beautiful and resplendent sight as he sauntered along the sidewalk with the brim of his hat tilted piratically over his eyes, looking like some swashbuckling medieval brigand who had been miraculously

transported into the twentieth century and put into modern dress without losing the swagger of a less inhibited age. In one hand he carried a brown paper parcel.

Chief Inspector Teal's pudgy hand closed on his arm near the corner of Burlington Gardens; and the Saint looked round and recognized him with a delighted and completely innocent smile.

"Why, hello there, Claud Eustace," he murmured. "The very man I've been looking for." He discovered Corrio coming up out of the background, and smiled again. "Hi, Gladys," he said politely.

Corrio seized his other arm and worked him swiftly and scientifically into a doorway. There was a gleam of excitement in his dark eyes. "It looks as if my theory was right again," he said to Teal.

Mr. Teal kept his grip of the Saint's arm. His rather froglike eyes glared at the Saint angrily, but not with the sort of anger that most people would have expected.

"You damn fool," he said, rather damn-foolishly. "What did you have to do it for? I told you when you came home that you couldn't get away with that stuff any more."

"What stuff?" asked the Saint innocently.

Corrio had grabbed the parcel out of his hand, and he was tearing it open with impatient haste.

"I think this is what we're looking for," he said.

The broken string and torn brown paper fluttered to the ground as Corrio ripped them off. When the outer wrappings were gone he was left with a cardboard box. Inside the box there was a layer of crumpled tissue paper. Corrio jerked it out and remained staring frozenly at what was finally exposed. This was a fully dressed and very lifelike doll with features that were definitely familiar. Tied around its neck on a piece of ribbon was a ticket on which was printed: *Film Star Series, No* 12*: CLARK GABLE.* 2/11.

An expression of delirious and incredulous relief began to creep over the chubby curves of Teal's pink face—much the same expression as might have come into the face of a man who, standing close by the crater of a rumbling volcano, had seen it suddenly explode only to throw off a shower of fairy lights and coloured balloons. The corners of his mouth began to twitch, and a deep vibration like the tremor of an approaching earthquake began to quiver over his chest.

Corrio's face was black with fury. He tore out the rest of the packing paper and squeezed out every scrap of it between his fingers, snatched the doll out of the box and twisted and shook it to see if anything could have been concealed inside it. Then he flung that down also

among the mounting fragments of litter on the ground. He thrust his face forward until it was within six inches of the Saint's.

"Where are they?" he snarled savagely.

"Where are who?" asked the Saint densely.

"You know damn well what I'm talking about," Corrio said through his teeth. "What have you done with the stuff you stole from Oppenheim's last night? Where are the Vanderwoude emeralds?"

"Oh, them," said the Saint mildly. "That's a funny question for *you* to ask." He leaned lazily on the wall against which Corrio had forced him, took out his cigarette case and looked at Teal.

"As a matter of fact," he said calmly, "that's what I wanted to see you about. If you're particularly interested I think I could show you where they went to."

The laugh died away on Teal's lips, to be replaced by the startled and hurt look of a dog that has been given an unexpected bone and then kicked almost as soon as it has picked it up.

"So you do know something about that job," he said slowly.

"I know plenty," said the Saint. "Let's take a cab."

He straightened up off the wall. For a moment Corrio looked as if he would pin him back there, but Teal's intent interest countermanded the movement without speaking or even looking at him. Teal was puzzled and disturbed, but somehow the Saint's quiet voice and unsmiling eyes told him that there was something there to be taken seriously. He stepped back, and Simon walked past him unhindered and opened the door of a taxi standing by the kerb.

"Where are we going to?" asked Teal, as they turned into Piccadilly.

The Saint grinned gently, and settled back in his corner with his cigarette. He ignored the question.

"Once upon a time," he said presently, "there was a smart detective. He was very smart because after some years of ordinary detecting he had discovered that the main difficulty about the whole business was that you often have to find out who committed a crime, and this is liable to mean a lot of hard work and a good many disappointments. So this guy, being a smart fellow, thought of a much simpler method, which was more or less to persuade the criminals to tell him about it themselves. For instance, suppose a crook got away with a tidy cargo of loot and didn't want to put it away in the refrigerator for icicles to grow on: he could bring his problem to our smart detective, and our smart detective could think it over and say, 'Well, Featherstonehaugh, that's pretty easy. All you do is just go and hide this loot in a dustbin on Greek Street or hang it on a tree in Hyde Park, or something like that, and I'll do a very smart piece of detecting and find it. Then

I'll collect the reward and we'll go shares in it.' Usually this was pretty good business for the crook, the regular fences being as miserly as they are; and the detective didn't starve on it either; but somehow it never seemed to occur to the other detectives to wonder how he did it."

He finished speaking as the taxi drew up at a small and dingy hotel near Charing Cross.

Mr. Teal was sitting forward, with his round moon-face looking like a surprised plum pudding and his eyes fixed sleepily on the Saint's face.

"Go on," he said gruffly.

Simon shook his head and indicated the door.

"We'll change the scene again."

He got out and paid off the driver, and the other two followed him into the hotel. Corrio's face seemed to have gone paler under its olive tan.

Simon paused in the lobby and glanced at him.

"Will you ask for the key, or shall I? It might be better if you asked for it," he said softly, "because the porter will recognize you. Even if he doesn't know you by your right name."

"I don't quite know what you're talking about," Corrio said coldly, "but if you think you can wriggle out of this with any of your wild stories, you're wasting your time." He turned to Teal. "I have got a room here, sir—I just use it sometimes when I'm kept in town late and I can't get home. It isn't in my own name, because—well, sir, you understand—I don't always want everybody to know who I am. This man has got to know about it somehow, and he's just using it to try and put up some crazy story to save his own skin."

"All the same," said Teal, with surprising gentleness, "I'd like to go up. I want to hear some more of this crazy story."

Corrio turned on his heel and went to the desk. The room was on the third floor—an ordinary cheap hotel room with the usual revolting furniture to be found in such places. Teal glanced briefly over its salient features as they entered, and looked at the Saint again.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

The Saint sat down on the edge of the bed and blew smoke rings.

"It would probably have gone on a lot longer," he said, "if this smart detective hadn't thought one day what a supremely brilliant idea it would be to combine business with profit, and have the honour of convicting a most notorious and elusive bandit known as the Saint—not forgetting, of course, to collect the usual cash reward in the process. So he used a very good-looking young damsel—you ought to meet her sometime, Claud, she really is a peach—having some idea that the

Saint would never run away very fast from a pretty face. In which he was damn right. . . . She had a very well-planned hard-luck story, too, and the whole act was most professionally staged. It had all the ingredients that a good psychologist would bet on to make the Saint feel that stealing Oppenheim's emeralds was the one thing he had left glaringly undone in an otherwise complete life. Even the spadework of the job had already been put in, so that she could practically tell the Saint how to pinch the jewels. So that our smart detective must have thought he was sitting pretty, with a sucker all primed to do the dirty work for him and take the rap if anything went wrong—besides being still there to take the rap when the smart detective made his arrest and earned the reward if everything went right."

Simon smiled dreamily at a particularly repulsive print on the wall for a moment.

"Unfortunately I happened to drop in on this girl one time when she wasn't expecting me, and I heard her phoning a guy named Corrio to tell him I was well and truly hooked," he said. "On account of having read in the *Bulldog* some talk by a guy of the same name about what he was going to do to me, I was naturally interested."

Corrio started forward.

"Look here, you——"

"Wait a minute." Mr. Teal held him back with an unexpectedly powerful arm. "I want the rest of it. Did you do the job, Saint?"

Simon shook his head sadly. It was at that point that his narrative departed, for the very first time, from the channels of pure veracity in which it had begun its course—but Mr. Teal was not to know this.

"Would I be such a sap, Claud?" he asked reproachfully. "I knew I could probably get away with the actual robbery, because Corrio would want me to; but as soon as it was over, knowing in advance who'd done it, he'd be chasing round to catch me and recover the emeralds. So I told the girl I'd thought it all over and decided I was too busy." The Saint sighed, as if he was still regretting a painful sacrifice. "The rest is pure theory; but this girl gave me a cloak-room ticket from Victoria Station this morning and asked me if I'd collect a package this afternoon and take it along to an address on Bond Street. I didn't do it because I had an idea what would happen; but my guess would be that if somebody went along and claimed the parcel they'd find the emeralds in it. Not all the emeralds, probably, because that'd be too risky if I got curious and opened it; but some of them. The rest are probably here—I've been looking around since we've been here, and I think there's some new and rather amateurish stitching in the

upholstery of that chair. I could do something with that reward myself——"

Corrio barred his way as he got off the table.

"You stay where you are," he grated. "If you're trying to get away with some smart frame-up——"

"Just to make sure," said the Saint, "I fixed a dictagraph under the table yesterday. Let's see if it has anything to say."

Teal watched him soberly as he prepared to play back the record. In Chief Inspector Teal's mind was the memory of a number of things which he had heard Corrio say, which fitted into the picture which the Saint offered him much too vividly to be easily denied.

Then the dictagraph began to play. And Teal felt a faint shiver run up his spine at the uncannily accurate reproduction of Corrio's voice.

"*Smart work, Leo . . . I bet these must be worth every penny of the price on them.*"

The other voice was unfamiliar.

"*Hell, it was easy. The layout was just like you said. But how're you goin' to fix it on the other chap?*"

"*That's simple. The girl gets him to fetch a parcel from Victoria and take it where I tell her to tell him. When he gets there, I'm waiting for him.*"

"*You're not goin' to risk givin' 'im all that stuff?*"

"*Oh, don't be so wet. There'll only be just enough in the parcel to frame him. Once he's caught, it'll be easy enough to plant the rest somewhere and find it.*"

Corrio's eyes were wide and staring.

"It's a plant!" he screamed hysterically. "That's a record of the scene I played in the film test I made yesterday."

Simon smiled politely, cutting open the upholstery of the armchair and fishing about for a leather pouch containing about two hundred thousand pounds' worth of emeralds which should certainly be there unless somebody else had found them since he chose that ideal hiding-place for his loot.

"I only hope you'll be able to prove it, Gladys," he murmured; and watched Teal grasp Corrio's arm with purposeful efficiency.

AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

Cornell Woolrich's suspense story, TWO AGAINST THE TERROR, which appears in this issue, may at first seem out of place in a magazine such as this—but this is only if you belong, in strict defiance of both logic and history, to that school of thought which insists that its fictional murderers and villains be recognizably "of these times."

I say so because this refusal to admit that human nature has not changed too much is so—so naïve—and *so* much akin to the Victorian way of sweeping all sorts of unpleasant things under the rug of history. . . . This urge of violence—this urge to commit mayhem, if you wish—has after all been with us since the dawn of history—as it may very well be pointed out upon the gravestone of the race. Manners and mores have of course changed with the times but, nevertheless, a murderer in ancient Egypt and one of Caesare's talented people and, to come down to more recent times, some of Laurenti Beria's more trusted staff members, are all astonishingly alike when it comes to a question of what made them tick, and what made them take pleasure in their work, and there is *no* denying that they were all singularly dedicated craftsmen. . . . No?

The French Revolution was to afford many persons of this kind a very special outlet for their talents. Revolutions—whatever their motivation—however impassioned and sincere individual participants may be—so often do just that. And the French Revolution, in the course of which so much more than simply a way of life was destroyed, represented a golden opportunity for these men who in another age would have employed other means to accomplish what they did, climb to power over the bodies of their own followers.

There is therefore a rather timeless quality to the unpleasantness coped with in Mr. Woolrich's story, as there is in the other stories by E. Phillips Oppenheim, by Lawrence G. Blochman, and by Sax Rohmer who—more than most—contributed so much to the folk myths of our times. These things could have happened to these people in any time and in any era, our race's ethos being what it is. At which point I had better stop for now, reminding you that you will also meet THE SMART DETECTIVE, who has the misfortune to encounter The Saint. . .

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

NEXT MONTH

THE USUAL ENDING

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SAX ROHMER:

SPIRIT OF THE BLACK HAWK

THE well-known firm of Wardson, Ltd., owning a long chain of theatres in Australia, recently sued Myria Nardova, the Russian danseuse, for breach of contract, claiming damages to the tune of five thousand pounds. Many will recall the case. It was explained in court that Nardova was probably the greatest living exponent of her art, and that her contract carried a salary never hitherto offered to an individual performer visiting the Commonwealth.

Nardova sailed from England in the R.M.S. *Taj Mahal*, bound to Australia via the Suez Canal. Wardson's opened a costly publicity campaign. The *Taj Mahal* was scheduled to call at Port Sudan, on the west coast of the Red Sea—and the dancer went ashore.

She never rejoined the *Taj Mahal.*

This, together with the fact that two months later Nardova turned up in Paris and merely cabled from there that "circumstances beyond her control" had compelled her to break Wardson's contract, constituted plaintiff's case. Nardova was represented but was not present.

In these circumstances, the firm of Wardson, Ltd., was granted the damages claimed with costs.

The mystery of that lacuna between the time when the temperamental Myria Nardova went ashore at Port Sudan and the date on which she joined a ship inward bound for Marseilles has never, to this day, been cleared up. . . .

In the lounge of the *Taj Mahal* the passengers were sipping coffee and liqueurs. Unmusical voices competed with the music of the liner's orchestra. Dinner was just over. Pastel-shaded creations designed in

From Sax Rohmer's *Tales of East and West*, 1933, New York. Reprinted by arrangement with the author's agents, Paul R. Reynolds.

exclusive salons formed an agreeable contrast, under a suffused glow of indirect lighting, to the sombre dinner kit of the men.

Nardova sat in an arched recess, with a group of admirers. She was exotically beautiful in a backless confection of apple-green. She had perfect shoulders—immortalized, if slightly misinterpreted, in Jacob Epstein's well-known bust. The ship's commander had just left the party.

"The Captain tells me the light we can see is at Damietta," said the dancer. "Does that mean that we shall reach Port Said in the morning?"

"Yes," replied an Australian acquaintance. "I expect we shall be slowing down soon. The last time I passed this way was during the war—in a transport, for Alexandria. Some of us went up to the native quarter there to see the Arab girls dance. It would have interested you, I think."

"Interested *me*?" Nardova exclaimed. "Think again! This wonderful Eastern dancing is a mere rumour. Artistically, it's about on a par with the wonderful Eastern cities—which are really just rubbish heaps."

Voice and accent proclaimed what everybody in the "show business" knew: that the only thing Russian about Myria Nardova was her name.

"You are less than just to the East, madame," said a darkly handsome member of the party. "Alexandria, for instance, was the supreme work of Alexander, builder of cities. The first lighthouse in the world existed there; and on its summit burned an everlasting fire—which endured for nearly sixteen hundred years."

"Something like the light on top of the London Coliseum?"

Nardova's courtiers smiled broadly at this sally of the famous artiste: and the Egyptian—known on the passenger list as Osman Mirghâni—smiled also, as one smiles at a petted child.

"Nevertheless, madame," he added, "when old Alexandria was sacked and destroyed by the Caliph Omar, the world lost much. Half a million books—many of them unique; four thousand palaces, and their priceless treasures. Today, Pompey's Pillar and the catacombs alone hold the secrets of the past."

Osman Mirghâni's manner and his unmoved regard, made Nardova feel ill at ease. She resented this intensely. She glanced aside, crossing one silk-clad leg over the other.

"All the same," she declared petulantly, "they can't dance!"

"The basis of dancing, divine madame, is to you, as to us, a blending of history with human passion. To the ignorant, it may seem that some dancers call only to man's crude desires. But to us the art of the great

dancer tells strange tales—tales of worlds that are dead; of worlds of which no living man yet has knowledge. . . . In your art you are inspired. If you knew the source of that inspiration you would think more kindly of the East. . . ."

He stood up, kissed Nardova's hand, and left the party.

The dancer shuddered; and someone instantly draped a fur-trimmed wrap about her bare shoulders.

"Surely you're not cold, Myria?"

"No. But that man gives me the jim-jams!"

The ship's orchestra played the second part of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéhérazade*. . . .

As the *Taj Mahal* slowly threaded her way past the Wingate and Sanganeb shoals towards that low range of buildings marking the harbour of Port Sudan, the liner's passengers grouped, watchful, on the promenade deck.

Nardova formed the centre of a coterie of her admirers dubbed by an American passenger who had somehow remained outside the radius of her ready smile, "The Tiffany Blonde's." A few yards further forward, Osman Mirghâni leaned over the white-scrubbed teak rail, his cleanly proportioned figure giving distinction to a well tailored suit of tussore silk. Suddenly, he left the acquaintance with whom he had been carrying on a desultory conversation, and joined the group further aft.

Watching his opportunity as the ship was swinging in the harbour basin and most of the "Tiffany Blonde's" had crossed to the other side of the deck, the Egyptian laid a detaining hand on the arm of the dancer.

"Excuse me, Madame Nardova," he said. "But I leave you at this port and may have no opportunity to say good-bye."

Nardova paused, glancing up at him with veiled eyes.

"I wish you to know that I am of the most sincere of your worshippers. Your contempt of my race does not make you less than a great artist. It doesn't matter. In London I had the happiness to see you perform your justly celebrated Dance of the Black Hawk. I recognized inspiration. Accept my humble homage, madame."

Nardova's clear blue eyes grew hard, critical. She drew slightly away.

Osman Mirghâni instantly detected that faint movement of aversion. He appraised it at its true value . . . and was content.

"I have a request to make." He drew something from his coat pocket. "I make it humbly. It would add to my happiness if you would consent to wear this ring whenever you perform the Dance of the Black Hawk. Only one other woman has ever possessed a similar ring. There are but three in the world; and one of those three encircles the finger of the dead. Guard it, and for my sake—respect it."

Nardova, although still conscious of faint repulsion, found the ring in her extended palm. It was so hard to refuse. . . .

In the privacy of her state-room she examined it.

On her slim finger the unexpected gift seemed a trifle massive, but the dancer's appraising eye warmed to its evident worth. She held it in the strong light that streamed into her cabin from a porthole, slowly turning it in the penetrating sunshine.

The ring consisted of an age-worn band of dull gold on the outer surface of which appeared a pair of serpents, tails intertwined. Firmly held in their extended mouths was a flawless square of rich lapis-lazuli, bordered with small rubies. Tiny emeralds represented the serpents' eyes; and in the centre of the flat, gloriously blue stone was cunningly inscribed the outline of a hawk in black. In the top left-hand corner she could just detect a tiny hieroglyphic.

A worshipper of the bizarre, the ring fascinated Nardova. It was fit to rank with other rarities laid at her twinkling feet. She allowed herself the luxury of reflecting that only genius can unlock the cupboard of unusual gifts, and was glad that the hurried departure of the Egyptian had precluded complications. He was clearly a "mug," but he had served his turn. She left the ring on her finger.

The liner was already moored alongside the wharf. On the quay sweeping arms of hydraulic cranes were depositing slings of varied merchandise.

Natives clamoured on the dock side offering wares or services: Sudanese, Arabs, Hindus, and even a gentle Cingalee—a gesticulating group of nondescript humanity.

"We must certainly go up to the town," Nardova pronounced. "I'm longing to buy one of those famous ivory necklaces."

Descending the gangway, the dancer, escorted by a trio of admirers, proceeded in a dusty car recklessly handled by a native driver towards the whitewashed houses of that queer township which crouches on the rim of the desert.

The only clue to the problem which later excited so much interest (and this clue a missing one) was a certain Arab boy who attached his small person to the party with that calm, rigid persistence characteristic of his class.

Throughout their brief tour of the native quarter, this smiling young Arab hung around the fringes of the group of Europeans, amusing them with quaint perversions of the English language. Vainly he tried to arouse interest in his stock of imitation amber necklaces, his several failures merely resulting in more expansive smiles. Again and again

Nardova pronounced the word "ivory," but it seemed to convey nothing to the boy's mind.

Until suddenly—the party was seated on the veranda of the hotel—she saw that the boy, now standing on the pavement below, had discarded his rejected stock and was holding up a number of ivory necklaces suppliantly towards her.

"He's got them!" she exclaimed excitedly. "The little beast had them all along!"

She slipped away from the table and ran down the steps. The trio of "Tiffany Blonde's" commented with amusement upon a vivid pantomime of bargaining and tolerantly noted the swaying fortunes of a potential deal. They saw the young Arab vigorously shake his head with all the abandon of an Oriental vendor, pointing a slender finger towards an adjoining shop.

Nardova nodded and followed the boy. A few paces took her out of sight of the party on the veranda . . . and out of sight of the races known as White. . . .

Nardova's blue eyes opened slowly. She struggled to escape from a nightmare world into which she had been plunged by a preparation of *hashish*—although of this fact she was unaware. Her dull gaze fell upon a huge limousine, its wheels fitted with caterpillar gear. Its dark enamel work reflected the dancing flames of a camp fire.

Turning her head she saw the muffled figures of two Arabs crouching over the fire; the low tones of their conversation mingled with a sound of crackling wood. A pleasant, pungent smell of aromatic smoke was wafted across to her. Hemming them in, like a mighty immutable law, was that living silence which is the voice of the desert.

Further away she could just distinguish the flicker of another fire, backed by two small tents pitched near the black outline of a second automobile.

A soft, discreet cough brought the frightened dancer, who had been resting on one elbow, sharply to her knees. She turned. A massive, black-robed negro squatted three paces behind her.

"Who are you?" she asked, her voice little more than a whisper. "Why am I here?"

"I am Hamid, lady, and the servant of my master. It is by his commands that you are here, lady."

The girl scanned his black features closely—eagerly. She was ill, she thought; some sudden sickness had gripped her. This was all untrue—untrue as those other phantasms from which she had seemed to awaken. . . .

"Where are you taking me?" she murmured weakly.

"Towards the Mountain That Is Holy we hasten at the Master's bidding, White Lady of the Black Hawk."

And now Nardova realized that his rapt gaze was fixed upon the lapis-lazuli ring which she wore.

"Who is the Master?" she whispered.

"The Master is the Servant, O Lady," came the bewildering reply—and Hamid, pointing to the ring, performed the customary Arab salutation.

"Fear nothing with me, lady," he continued. "Hamid has hunted the ibex in the mountains and watched the waters of the Tsana. At Khartoum Hamid is known, and in the war ranks of the great King George. For eight years Hamid was soldier, with rifle and machine gun. Also butler in Port Said with very noble English people and understand their ways."

He rose, bowed, and left her, shortly to return with an ancient silver receptacle filled with fragrant coffee and wooden platters laden with tinned asparagus, cheese made from the milk of goats, and biscuits.

Nardova assessed her chances of escape—of rescue. They were nil. Fatalism goes to the make-up of every artist; and Myria Nardova was an artist. Hysteria came; but she conquered it in the silence of the tent allotted to her.

Day after day the two cars lumbered on their way across a seemingly limitless desert. Nardova, having realized that apparently she had nothing to fear from those who travelled with her, became almost resigned to the monotonous heat of the day for the sake of the beauty of those purple star-studded nights, when tents would be erected and the fires of her escort flicker faintly under the light of the moon. There was no great discomfort; and, once fully recovered from the effects of the drug, her natural courage and high animal spirits returned. Even warm baths were available at certain camping places, thanks to a portable outfit included in her tent equipment. And she became her own laundress. Fear and anger gave place to a burning curiosity.

She early discovered that the second automobile was manned by eight Arabs and was in reality a cunningly disguised armoured car from whose masked interior two machine guns could sweep the horizon at a few seconds' notice.

Hamid was the only person with whom she was able to converse, since the other members of the retinue kept strictly to their own company, and indeed scarcely gave a glance in her direction. From their general behaviour and the brisk, organized manner in which they carried out their various tasks, Nardova deduced that they also had been army-trained. Something queer there was about Hamid, in voice

and bearing; but her ignorance of the East gave her no clue to the mystery of his peculiar position in relation to herself. This she was to learn later.

There were times, however, when the uncertainty of her fate at the end of this long journey awakened her, trembling, in the night—to dreadful speculations which she dared not contemplate. Again and again she questioned Hamid; but on this subject Hamid was mute.

It was near sunset of the day on which she had her first glimpse of a vast range of snow mountains, for which they were apparently making, that the smooth routine of the journey was interrupted. Nardova was half asleep in her corner when the car came to an abrupt halt. Hamid shouted rapid instructions. The second car ranged up into a position a little ahead and to the left. With mechanical precision the glass windows dropped into sockets, and steel shutters, permitting the use of the machine guns, sprang up and replaced them.

"What is it?" Nardova asked sharply. "What's the matter?"

Hamid pointed to what looked like moving specks in the distance.

"The Black Darwíshes, lady! But have no fear. . . ."

More readily said than done. The girl's heart beat madly as she watched the swift approach of the desert bandits. The speed of their camels amazed her. And when that silent horde gathered around the silent cars and fired rifle shots into the air, she shrank back in terror. The Sheikh fearlessly rode his camel in between the two cars and cried out something which Nardova did not understand. Hamid opened the door and stepped out to meet the eagle-eyed old man. One of the drivers covered Hamid's movements with a light Lewis gun.

A brief conversation took place. Then the Sheikh tapped the head of his camel sharply with a short cane which he carried, and the beautiful beast dropped to its knees. The Sheikh dismounted, and Hamid returned to the car.

"Show them the *ring*, lady!" he whispered.

At his word, the driver manipulated a steel shutter so that a space was made. Nardova extended her slim white arm, the delicate skin unblemished by sunburn, since she had protected her arms and shoulders throughout the voyage and the desert journey.

One short, high-pitched cry from the Sheikh of the Black Darwíshes brought the other camels to their knees. His followers dismounted and pressed forward, so that presently they surrounded that slender arm protruding from the car window.

As one man, they prostrated themselves on the sand. Excited murmuring gave place to deathly silence. This in turn was broken by a weird chant led by the Sheikh. All took it up—including Hamid.

It was awesome—unearthly; but it ended at last. The Sheikh rose from his knees and cried some rapid command. In a moment the wild riders had remounted and their camels were afoot again. The cars moved off to a salvo from the antique rifles of the men of the desert. . . .

Two days later the edge of the sands was reached. The desert broke like a dry ocean about the foothills of that towering range of mountains long seen from afar. The caterpillar gear was detached and the cars progressed rapidly on their pneumatic tyres. An ascending road grew steeper and ever more difficult to negotiate; until, shortly before sunset, they reached the shelter of a wooded ravine, through which ran a trickling rivulet.

A cluster of small, round, grass-thatched huts, or *tukuts*, nestled under high kosso trees, and a number of men left their shelter and raced towards the cars. Nardova had barely time to note the sepia-black Semitic features and kinky hair of the strangers before Hamid had drawn down the blinds.

Heavily veiled, the dancer was borne still further upward in a litter with draped sides carried upon the shoulders of constantly changing relays of bearers. . . .

Through an opening in the curtains, Nardova saw vast, decaying outer walls of some remote city enclosing several miles of fertile land from whose rich soil sprang long grasses and a profusion of trees. A huge building of crumbling black granite which dominated the place occupied an eerie site on a ledge of one of the highest mountains of the range, gazing, ruinous, across blurred lands more than ten thousand feet below, to the distant, shimmering desert.

Streams of crystal-clear water irrigated the meadows. The notes of many birds came from the shelter of fig trees; and bees flashed golden in the light of the setting sun as they returned to their hives of rolled bark suspended from the acacias.

In an apartment which overhung the precipice, Nardova's litter was set down. She swept the curtains aside and looked out. This was the mysterious destination to which she had been brought, hazardously, from the Red Sea. The mystery of her abduction was about to be cleared up. Whatever the truth should prove to be, she was ready for it. . . .

Three tall men with shaven heads, men who wore plain blue robes, confronted Hamid, who was engaged in voluble conversation with them. Nardova was intrigued—vaguely disappointed. Surely, they were *priests* of some kind? Then—a new terror, one not hitherto experienced, began to pour ice into her veins. For the passion of some primitive lover she was prepared. She knew how to handle men—even half-civilized men. But these shaven priests!

Abruptly Hamid turned to her.

"Lady," he said, "those who guard the shrine of the Black Hawk have agreed——"

"Agreed to *what?*"

"In three more nights, lady, the moon is full. Men from the mountains come here, as their fathers come, worshipping the Black Hawk. It is Night of the Awakening. My master knows well that lady can dance lightly as bird flies from tree to tree. Master says, each year Black Hawk must awake—or what will all those people say? Lady who danced before has passed away. She not like you, lady, so beautiful or so wonderful. But these people know nothing. Great mystery must keep on. Offerings very rich and prosperous——"

"I don't know—what you mean. . . ."

"So easy, lady. You must dance Awakening of the Black Hawk. Then I take you safely back to Port Sudan. No harm, lady—no trouble. These fat priests ask you to remove garments so that they may judge of form. Oh! it is nothing, lady! They are unhappy in deficient manhood, lady, the same as poor Hamid. Then, the temple barber——"

"No!" cried Nardova—"No! My hair——"

"Must be made black, lady, like the wings of the hawk. But—it can be washed out. . . ."

For many hours of the next day and of the day that followed, Nardova—her audience a group of blue-robed priests—rehearsed the dance celebrated throughout Europe.

She had approved the exquisitely fashioned dress that she must wear on the night of the full moon. Thousands upon thousands of jet-black feathers had been laboriously attached to a soft skin lining, the strange costume being surmounted by a skilfully wrought head of a black hawk. Wings that spread easily and naturally when she raised her arms, and marvellously jointed toes terminating in amber claws, completed the symbolic bird.

At first she had experienced some difficulty in manipulating the wings and in seeing through two tiny woven eyelets hidden by the mask of the bird's head. But perseverance had conquered. And on the night of the full moon she became aware of a sort of exaltation—something quite different from the nervous tension of an ordinary "first night." . . .

From the shadowed heights of a lofty bamboo cage whose pliant, curving meshes met immediately above her, she stared down through the eyelets of the head-dress upon a scene more strange than any she had witnessed. An hour had elapsed since she had ascended the tapering ladder. The priests had removed this ladder after draping folds of some dull black material about the cage, behind which she was now hidden.

The round, shaven head of one of these priests appeared from time to time at an opening in the dome of the roof. She could see that he held some instrument of ivory in his hand, which he directed at short intervals towards the moon, as if to gauge the lunar transit. Slightly drawing aside the black canopy, Nardova watched, spellbound.

Through a perfumed haze arising from aromatic gums whose spiral smoke ascended from glowing braziers, the dancer could just distinguish a densely packed mass of devotees crouching in sombre garments. Bordering the silent throng like a hem of blue, she saw the robes of the priests. Forming a semi-circular line, they faced the huge cage.

A low chanting began, led by the priests—the same that she had heard in the desert. Louder it grew, louder and more deep-throated. Mingling with it now was the sound of the *a'ood*, and an insistent modulated throb of *darabukkehs*.

Suddenly, the low voice of Hamid reached her quite distinctly:

"The Call is coming, lady! Have no fear. Remember at the right moment to cut the thongs." (She carried a sharp knife in her hidden right hand.) "Hamid hurries to the cedar tree and will be waiting. Have no fear."

The weird chanting died away. The *a'oods* grew silent. Only the drums throbbed dimly. A loud bird-call, resembling the note of a hornbill greatly amplified, sounded eerily. Nardova grasped the line down which she had to drop.

The multitude was deathly silent.

One loud note of a gong reverberated in booming echoes from wall to wall of the ancient building. Unseen hands whipped away the dark covering. And a knife-edged shaft of moonlight shot down upon her from above.

Every head was bowed to the temple floor . . . upon which Nardova dropped lightly, still enclosed by the wide meshes of the cage. Gleaming teeth and flashing eyes flecked the dense, black mass, like combers on a moonlit sea. A figure wearing a white robe on the breast of which appeared the Black Hawk emblem occupied a raised dais in the midst of the throng. A drawn hood obscured his features. . . .

Nardova fluttered silky wings and excuted a pirouette. A subdued wail of reed instruments declared itself. The drums awoke in muted throbbing. . . .

That wild, caressing music intruded just the professional element required to attune the dancer to her task. A lifetime of training came to her aid. This packed temple was no more than a crowded "house"; the exaltation of the true artist lifted her above common earth. Nardova would dance . . . as only Nardova *could* dance.

Her agile body swaying, her little, hidden feet flickering in the intricate measures of that pantomime which told of the birth, life, and death of the sacred hawk, the breathing of her singular audience came to her as a sustained sigh above the reeds and the drums. She held them, slaves, helpless slaves, spellbound by her art. She was excelling herself. She sang, softly, as she danced—her own music, written for her by a famous Frenchman, "The Dance of the Black Hawk." It was, as many had said inspiration; beauty bordering on tears.

As the end of the tragic story drew near, the music grew slower—slower; the drum throbs died away.

Nardova beat her ruffled wings against the bars and sank, a quivering mass of feathers, to the floor. . . .

The heavy breathing of that concourse was like the murmur of an incoming tide. Then—led by the priests—came the chant which was Nardova's final cue: "Release the Spirit." It was taken up until it boomed, awesome, from wall to wall of the building.

A clear stone path bisected the packed mass of humanity. It led to the temple doors. Four priests advanced and threw the great cage open. The cymbaline note of the gong split the silence, as Nardova threw off her head-piece and cut the fastenings which attached the hawk dress. . . .

A white, slender body sprang lightly from a mound of feathers—the ivory body of a goddess if ever men had beheld one. Those champagne curls dear to two continents were now ebony black. Their blackness accentuated the delicacy of that peerless skin. Nardova, dusky-locked, but as fair as a *hashish* houri, sped, a living flame, along the stone aisle. A cry like a groan greeted her passing. Men looked—and grovelled. No man touched her.

Later, many days later—she recalled meeting the gaze of piercing eyes looking out from the shadow of a white cowl. Their fixed regard stirred memories. . . .

And, when the hillmen gather, high up in the Symien Mountains, inside those protecting stockades which enclose the rude grass and mud huts, the tale is told of how the White Spirit of the Black Hawk appeared to mortal eyes when the moon was at its full—the teller little knowing that he speaks of a nearly flawless performance by the greatest *ballerina* in Europe!

But Osman Mirghâni, smoking an after-dinner cigarette on the balcony of his Cairo villa, sometimes permits himself to smile as he gazes meditatively across the desert towards the unseen mountains of Ethiopia.

BAIT FOR A MAN-TRAP

by Lawrence G. Blochman

A strange sensation chilled him when he realised that the hand of an old brass-pounder was buzzing a warning....

EVEN before the murder, Charlie Gray sensed that his new job was strictly for the birds—the sea birds that wheeled and swooped and screamed around the lonely house perched on a cliff high above the ocean. His old friend Belden, when he had offered him the job, had said: "It's a snap, and it pays top dough." And he was right. Gray could sleep all day and put on the earphones for only a few hours at night, copying half a dozen messages, relaying them to a rotating series of San Francisco phone numbers, and occasionally—twice on days when trans-Pacific liners had approached the coast from the Far East—communicating with what appeared to be fishing smacks with blinker signals.

It was true that the messages received and sent by radio from the house on the cliff were largely concerned with fish of some kind or another—figures about a lobster catch, or Olympia oysters or sand-dabs, with an occasional reference to albicore or abalone or halibut. Gray, however, was under no illusion that he was in communication with the craft of a legitimate fishing fleet. First of all, the transmitter in the house on the cliff was operating on an amateur frequency, using amateur call letters—yet it was a wildly expensive set, with the most modern gadgets far beyond the dream of the average ham operator, feeding power into a small, unobtrusive antenna that was far more than that authorized for an amateur station and that gave it a range far greater than external appearance would suggest. Furthermore, why wasn't exchange of information centred on Fisherman's Wharf instead of an isolated house 25 miles out of San Francisco? And why was the bulk of the traffic concentrated between two and three o'clock in the morning?

Actually, Gray had begun to be uneasy about the job as soon as he laid eyes on Romer, the man Belden had sent him to see. There had

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been something about the flashy way Romer dressed and the curiously piercing expression of his small, close-set eyes that Gray didn't like. Romer had hired him without even asking to see his credentials; Belden's recommendation was plenty, he had said. And within an hour he had driven Gray to the lonely house on the cliff, answering his questions with either silence or non-committal grunts. He gave Gray a typewritten sheet of instructions, evaded questions about why his predecessor had quit, cursorily introduced Gray to a much-tattooed, well-muscled pair who also lived in the house by the sea, and promised to drive up and bring Gray back to San Francisco for the next week-end.

Gray's efforts to get chatty with the two men who shared the house were unsuccessful. The two spoke some strange language between them and were singularly ignorant of English—except when reading the messages that Gray plucked from the ether at two in the morning. One of the foreigners divided his time between scanning the sea with high-powered binoculars and exercising a dubious culinary talent to produce three vaguely Mediterranean but definitely indigestible meals a day. The other man was gone most of the day on mysterious errands which either took him up and down the steep trail that snaked along the face of the cliff, or to a small cove two miles away where bait could be bought, fishing tackle rented and small power boats chartered for fishing parties.

Gray's attempts to strike up a conversation with the unseen men to whom he relayed the piscatorial messages and who dictated answers were equally unsuccessful. Any deviation from the strict business at hand was coldly rebuffed. He could hardly wait for Joe Romer to come and get him for the promised week-end in San Francisco.

Romer must have arrived at the house on the cliff while Gray was asleep. The late afternoon sun was building a hard, brassy path across the Pacific when Gray woke up. He yawned, scratched himself and decided to go downstairs for a cup of coffee before taking his shower. He had just reached the head of the stairs and was standing there in pyjamas and slippers when the front door opened and a man came in whom Gray had never seen before, but who looked vaguely familiar. Where had he seen that square jaw and square shoulders, the square-toed shoes, the steady, purposeful grey eyes? On television, maybe? Or a picture in the papers?

The stranger closed the front door softly behind him, then turned to look into the dining-room on his right. He did not see Joe Romer push through the parted drapes behind him, stepping noiselessly, a stubby automatic in his hand. There was a flash and a roar—and the stranger pitched forward on his face and lay still.

Gray backed away from the head of the stairs, his ears ringing, his knees turned to rubber, his nostrils smarting with the acrid smell of burned powder. He had a glimpse of Romer dragging the stranger towards the hall closet. He barely had time to reach the bathroom before he became violently ill.

Shaking like a man with tertian malaria, he waited for ages behind the closed bathroom door, listening for a step on the stairs. When none came, he decided that Romer had not seen him and that the best thing to do would be to play possum. He crept back to bed and pulled the covers over himself.

At dinner, Joe Romer greeted Gray as though they were seeing each other for the first time that day. Neither he nor the two tattooed gorillas made any allusion to the stranger or his fate. While those few seconds had certainly been a nightmare, Gray knew perfectly well he had not been dreaming.

"I sure slept sound today," Gray said. "I thought I'd never wake up. I didn't hear you come in, Mr. Romer."

"That's good," Romer said. "Because you might be short on sleep tonight. I want to start for the city right after lunch."

"I'll be ready." Gray pushed back his plate, the garlic-scented mess on it scarcely touched.

When he was alone with radio instruments after midnight, Gray made a discreet inspection of the closet in the hall. The closet was empty —but there were blood stains on the carpet. It could not have been difficult to roll the body off the cliff into the pounding, churning surf.

Gray did not sleep that night—what was left of it—or next morning. Every time he closed his eyes he saw the stranger pitch forward, a bullet in his back—so he lay awake for hours, staring at the ceiling, listening to the eerie cry of the sea birds, shrill above the wail of the wind, and the mournful, relentless booming of the sea against the rocks at the foot of the cliff. . . .

Romer dropped Gray off at the apartment house in the Marina where they were staying with Mrs. Gray's brother and his wife. For the first time in his life, Gray was not glad to see his wife after a week's absence. He felt guilty as he kissed her—as though he himself had been a party to the murder. He would probably always feel guilty until he spilled the whole story to somebody. Unfortunately he could not unburden himself to his wife; Lila's brother was a cop. And although he trusted Lila to keep her mouth shut, it would only make matters worse for both of them to be nursing a guilty secret while accepting the hospitality of a police sergeant. He had to tell somebody,

though, or he would go nuts. He would tell Hugh Belden, then. After all, it was Belden who had got him the job in the first place.

Charlie Gray and Belden had been friends for more than fifteen years. During the last years of World War II, they had been radiomen together in the same cruiser in the Pacific. And when, after VJ Day, the Truman Administration had yielded to the pressure of the mother vote and hastily dismantled the greatest naval and military establishment the world had ever known, they returned to civilian life together. For some years they were radio operators together in the merchant marine, sometimes in the same ship in the Pacific. Then, on one of his Pacific runs, Gray had picked up a liver fluke while swimming in the Philippines—and his sea-going days were over. Although he had never before been seasick in his life, the miserable parasite he had acquired made him a chronic landlubber. The slightest ground swell transformed him into cringing, tortured, green-gilled, retching wreck. He was seasick for days on end—so sick he could not stand watch.

Gray's days ashore were not happy ones. The Navy had turned out so many radiomen in wholesale lots that commercial brass-pounders were a dime a dozen. The operators who got the available shore jobs after demobilization clung to their priorities. He picked up an occasional job here and there, but they were all temporary. He was surprised when Belden wrote that he, too, was coming ashore to work.

Belden had been vague about what he was doing ashore, but it had sounded steady and prosperous. And when Gray got a wire from Belden—he and Lila were living with Lila's folks in Omaha while Gray was taking courses in radio and television repair—offering the job in San Francisco, he was not surprised. And when the two air tickets plus a cheque for expenses arrived, he and his wife had both been overjoyed.

It seemed to Gray impossible that he had been at this new job only a week—a weird week at the lonely house on the sea cliff, a week shrouded in mystery and culminating in very definite horror. But it now seemed inevitable that he would have to give it up, even though he would again be among the unemployed. He hated to face Lila with the prospect but he could see no other way out—unless good old Hugh Belden could suggest one. He would have to talk to Belden.

Gray got off the North Beach streetcar and started up the incline leading to Telegraph Hill. He climbed timidly up the stoop of an old-fashioned, drab-painted wooded house. A thin, square-jawed little man with grizzled temples, he rang the bell marked "Belden." The electric latch buzzed angrily several times. Gray pushed the door open.

He walked up two dark flights. There was an unpainted streak up the centre of the stairway where a carpet runner had once been. Gray sniffed at the musty smell that haunted the house and wondered why Hugh Belden had abandoned the clean, sparkling, wind-swept vastness of the sea for life in a joint like this. He tapped lightly on the door, which was opened first a crack, then wide.

"Well, well, Charlie, come in, come in," said Belden. He had been shaving. Most of the lather had been scraped off his round, ruddy, fat face, but his triple chins—there had been only two last time Charlie Gray had seen them—were still concealed by foam. He wore only a pair of shorts, and his new corpulence overflowed the waist-band like a toy balloon squeezed at one end. "Sit down, Charlie," he said. "I'll be with you in two shakes. How's the new job." He disappeared into the bathroom without waiting for an answer.

Gray sat down at a table bearing a square-faced bottle and two glasses. He looked about him instinctively, noting that there was a door on the far side of the bathroom where Belden was snorting and splashing, and that the door was closed.

"Hugh," Gray said when Belden re-appeared, buttoning his shirt, "what the hell kind of a job did you get me into anyhow?"

Belden looked at his old friend with eyes that smiled knowingly. "By this time," he replied, "you must know as much about it as I do."

"I wish I did," Gray said. "It's not on the up-and-up, is it?"

"Sure it's on the level," Belden objected. "You'll never have to wait for your pay, you'll be treated white, and you get a fat bonus at Christmas."

"That's not what I mean. Sure, I guess the road is paved with gold and all that crap. But the road seems to lead to the jail house, doesn't it?"

"Hell," said Belden. "Nobody goes to jail any more unless you try to beat the income tax or tell some Senate Committee you don't want to incriminate yourself."

"The whole thing stinks," Gray said. "I don't know whether it's dope or espionage or just common smuggling, but I don't want any more of it. The place gives me the blue creeps. I'm not going back there Monday. I'm quitting."

"Don't be a damned fool," Belden argued. "You're getting good money, aren't you? You're supporting your wife again. In a month or so you'll have all your debts cleared up. And you know the old Roman saw—money don't smell, no matter where it comes from, as long as it comes regular. Look, Charlie, with winter coming on, I don't want to see you out in the cold again. You better talk this over

with your wife, because I don't think she'd like the idea either. Charlie, if you don't take this dough, somebody else will. And I want it to go to somebody who can put it to good use."

Belden took the two glasses from the table, turned them over to shake out the few drops remaining in the bottom of each, set one in front of Gray and pushed the bottle towards him.

"I want out," Gray insisted. "I don't want to get mixed up in murder, for no money. I guess you know that Joe Romer killed a man up there on the cliff yesterday."

"He did?" Belden seemed mildly surprised, but there was no change of expression in his harvest-moon of a face. "Who did he kill?"

"I never saw the guy before. He just walked into the house and Romer shot him in the back. It was a hell of a dirty thing. He and those two spigs up there must have got rid of the corpus by dropping it over the cliff."

A queer expression came into Belden's eyes—and it was not a pleasant one. "Maybe it was just an accident," he said.

"In a pig's eye!" said Gray. "I saw it all, but I haven't said anything to anybody but you. I pretended I was asleep. I wanted to talk to you first."

Belden's short, plump fingers drummed the table-top, as though he were tapping out a QRS. "What are you figuring on doing?" he said.

"What the hell can I do except quit?" Gray's high-pitched voice rose to a squeak. "Why, Lila——"

"Have another drink." Belden passed the bottle without shifting his stare from Gray's eyes. "I suppose you're sore at me because I couldn't offer you a job as vice president of RCA. I'm sorry, but I did my best. Of course, if it ain't good enough——"

"Now, Hugh," pleaded Gray. "Please don't give me that ungrateful-bastard routine. I don't know how deep you are in this racket, but I guess you made connections in Hongkong and Saigon and Singapore, and that you're making them pay off now. Was this guy that Romer shot in the back a narcotics agent?"

"I wouldn't know," said Belden, looking at the ceiling. "I haven't heard anything about it—if it really happened."

"It happened, all right," Grayson said quickly. "And while I don't go for running up the census figures on junkies and hop-heads, I guess I could sort of close my eyes for you. But my God, Hugh—murder!" Charlie Gray spread his hands hopelessly. "I'm living in a nightmare. I'll never be able to sleep again for the rest of my life. Honest."

"What do you want me to do, Charlie? I can get you some sleeping

pills, sure. But if this bird was killed, like you say, I can't bring him back to life."

"I know, Hugh. I know. But maybe you'll be seeing Joe Romer before Sunday night. . . ."

"So?"

"So maybe you could tell him not to bother picking me up. Maybe you could explain how I can't go back out there. I can't, Hugh."

Belden got up. The shadow of a frown flickered across his forehead. He rescued a cigar butt from the edge of a littered ash-tray, cleaned the ashes off the slightly frayed end with a match, clamped the butt between his teeth and lighted it. He took his time before blowing out the match and emitted several atomic-looking clouds before he finally said:

"You can't walk out like that, Charlie. You got to give Romer at least time to get somebody to take your place."

"There's plenty of brass-pounders looking for jobs these days," Gray said. "You know that, Hugh. I'd be glad to steer one your way—or his. But I can't go back."

"Look, Charlie. Am I a friend of yours?"

"You sure are, Hugh."

"I *thought* I was doing a friend a favour when I got you that job. I *know* I'm doing you one now when I tell you to hang on to it."

"I can't, Hugh. I'll go nuts."

"A little longer," Belden urged. "Don't quit now, Charlie."

A frightened grimace twisted Gray's lips. "Don't you understand, Hugh? Lila. . . . Her brother. . . ."

Belden was still drumming on the table. His head turned slowly to look into the bathroom, turned slowly back. "It's final, then?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

Belden raised a fat hand, let it drop wearily to the table. He got up and said: "Suit yourself."

Charlie Gray extended his hand. He thought Belden shook it with unusual fervour. He asked: "You're not sore at me, are you? I do appreciate everything you've done. But since that . . . that . . ."

"Sure, I understand." Belden seemed impatient to be rid of his friend. He opened the door, and with a plump arm around the smaller man's shoulder, eased him firmly into the hall.

"Well, so long," Gray said.

"Good luck."

Belden backed into the room and closed the door quickly. He stood a moment with his hand on the knob. He did not move immedi-

ately at the sound of another door opening and closing behind him. With great deliberateness he turned slowly to face the dapper young man who had just made an entrance through the bathroom.

The newcomer wore a closely tailored suit of panetella brown. Pointed shoes poked out from under knife creases in his trouser cuffs, and the maroon border of a silk handkerchief protruded from his breast pocket. The fuzzy brim of a fawn-coloured hat nearly obscured a pair of close-set dark eyes. Without a word the man in brown dropped into a chair, inserted a cigarette in a long ivory holder, planted his elbows on the table and snapped flame from a gold lighter. He rested his sharp chin on the palm of one hand and blew a cloud of silent smoke towards Belden. Belden sat down opposite him, chewing industriously on his cigar end.

"I hear you got a message for Joe Romer," said the man in brown. "Well, give."

"The acoustics are pretty good in this place, Joe," said Belden. "You heard."

"I heard plenty," said Romer. The difficult processes of thought wrinkled the narrow space between his eyes. Slowly the frown disappeared. He reached for the telephone that stood on a stack of phone books on the floor. He lifted the receiver, wedged it between his shoulder and ear and dialled operator.

"Western Union," he told the transmitter. "Hello, girlie. This is a prepaid telegram going to Mister Charles Gray, Nathalie Apartments, 1646 North Point Street, City. . . . Right. . . . Here's the message: 'Am in terrible fix. . . . Need your help bad. . . . Come immediately my apartment. . . .' The signature is 'Hugh Belden. . . .' Right. . . . This phone is listed under the name of Belden. . . . Sure, this is Belden speaking."

Romer replaced the instrument with triumphant gesture. He leaned back smugly and blew a smoke ring.

Belden had stopped chewing his cigar. "What's the idea?" he demanded.

"I want to see Gray. I ain't sure he wants to see me. For you he'll come on the run."

"What do you want with Charlie?" Belden asked uneasily.

"Just talk to him."

"He just left here a few minutes ago. Why didn't you talk to him while he was here, Joe?"

"I had a couple of things I wanted to do first. I like to plan things ahead."

"Look, Joe. What do you want to talk to Charlie about? I'll probably see him tonight. I could tell him."

"I'll tell him. It's personal. He seemed a little miffed because I didn't give him no formal introduction to that T-man I had to plug yesterday. I thought I ought to explain that the guy wasn't really a friend, just an old acquaintance, a big shot in the narcotics bureau who happened to stumble on our little seaside villa. I don't want Charlie to think I was being rude to him."

Belden ran his thumb nervously over his three chins in rapid succession. He said: "You aren't worried about Charlie, are you, Joe? Charlie's O.K."

"I know," said Romer. "A swell guy."

"No kidding, Joe. Charlie won't write to the papers."

"I ain't worried." Romer spoke with the ends of his lips. His cigarette holder remained clenched between his teeth as he talked. He stared at Belden unblinkingly. Belden shifted his haunches as though he might be sticking to his chair.

"You going to talk Charlie into staying on the job?" Belden asked.

"I might," Romer said.

"Or maybe . . . maybe you're thinking of putting him on some other job?"

Romer did not answer. He was very much engrossed in digging a cigarette end out of his holder with a black-headed pin he had taken from the back of his lapel. He inserted a fresh cigarette into the ivory tube, but did not light it immediately.

"Your pal ought to have the wire by now," he said at last. "How long do you think he'll take to show up here?"

Belden shrugged. "Fifteen, twenty minutes. Why?"

"Just wondering." Romer struck flame from his gold lighter.

Belden stared at Romer with eyes that did not quite focus. His thumb was again exploring his chins, and his forehead was dewy with perspiration. He pushed back his chair and made a tentative move to get up.

"I guess you won't need me," he began.

"Sit down!" Romer ordered. "Sure I need you."

"What for, Joe?"

"Guess," said Romer with a half smile.

Belden watched Romer get up and walk briskly around the room, hands in his pockets, cigarette holder cocked at a jaunty angle. As his eyes followed the tour of inspection, the perspiration trickled down the fat man's temples. He wiped his face with a large handkerchief.

Romer closed a window that was open a few inches. He opened the

door, glanced down the stairway, closed the door again, leaned against the wall and squinted towards the table. Then he stooped and began rolling the rug back from the door.

Belden sprang up with unexpected agility. "Hey!" he said. "What goes on?"

"Stains is hard to get out of rugs," Romer explained.

The colour faded from Belden's fat cheeks and returned as one small pink spot under each eye. He swallowed twice.

"Have a heart, Joe," he pleaded. "Not here."

"You should feel flattered." Romer straightened up and thrust his hands into his pockets. "Shows I trust you—even more than I trusted you with that five grand I let you take to get you out of that mess last——"

"I'll work that off, Joe. Don't worry."

"I ain't worried," said Romer.

Belden gripped his arm. "Please, Joe! Not here in my place!"

Romer shook off Belden's hand. "Listen!" he snapped. "I just heard on the radio that that T-man's body washed up on the beach about three miles below our place. You think I want that job pinned on me? You think I want an eye-witness walking around loose, an eye-witness with a cop in the family?"

"But this is my apartment, Joe."

"I told you I had to stay out of sight for a few days, didn't I? I told you I picked up a tail as soon as I got to my own place today, and I had a helluva time shaking him. Somebody's been talking out of turn about that Greek truck driver that got killed last month, and I don't crave to sit down on no clutch of cyanide eggs on his account, or on account of your eye-witness friend either. So, since I got to stay here, I'll do my homework here."

"You can't!" Belden declared.

"Who'll stop me?" Romer lifted one eyebrow and the left corner of his mouth.

Belden averted Romer's gaze and said nothing. Romer pulled the table to one side of the room and placed two chairs on the opposite side near the window. He put a third chair behind the table and sat down.

"You'll open the door for him," Romer said. "Open it part way and head him for those chairs over there. He'll have his back to me. You hang back a step to close the door. That leaves him uncovered. Then——"

To punctuate his unfinished sentence, he produced a long, blue-barrelled revolver with a front sight the size of half a dime. (The auto-

matic he had used on the T-man was in the Pacific, out of reach of ballistic experts.) He broke the pistol, spun the cylinder briefly, examined the cartridges. Then he snapped it shut and laid it gently on the table in front of him. He grinned at Belden, leaned back in his chair and blew a smoke ring.

Belden said nothing. He moved a chair closer to the window and straddled it, looking out at the courtyard. The late afternoon fog was rolling in through the Golden Gate, whisking ghostly garlands through the sombre branches of two tall cypress trees. Belden picked up a half-burnt match from the window sill, broke off one end and pensively started cleaning his finger nails.

Romer smoked in fidgety silence for five minutes. Suddenly he frowned. "Fifteen cents for your thoughts," he said.

"What?" Belden blinked as though he had just been aroused from deep slumber. "Why, I was just thinking you'd have to be getting a new operator."

"Without your help," Romer said. "No more old friends."

"What you ought to get," said Belden, "is one of these machines that work like a typewriter. They got a lot of advantages over a man. They don't get hungry and they can't testify in court."

"I don't want nothing in writing, ever," said Romer.

Belden resumed cleaning his nails.

Romer looked at his watch. He lit a cigarette, stamped it out after four puffs, lighted another almost immediately.

When the door bell rang, both men jumped—just as if they had not been expecting it. Belden remained seated.

"The door!" Romer ordered.

Belden arose slowly. He crossed the room with heavy, deliberate steps. He had not gone more than half-way when the bell rang again.

Romer picked up his pistol, swung the sights into line with the door.

Belden reached out a fat forefinger towards the button that worked the latch on the street door downstairs.

Charlie Gray found the telegram waiting for him when he got home. He puzzled over what "terrible fix" could have overtaken Belden in the short time since his departure. The tone of the telegram, however, was no puzzle. Here was an unmistakable plea for his immediate presence. He could not ignore it.

He retrieved his hat, mumbled an unintelligible excuse to his wife and started out again. His brother-in-law was waiting for the elevator, on his way to report for duty at Portsmouth Square, and offered to drop him off on the way.

As he stopped his car in front of the high-stooped wooden house on the slope of Telegraph Hill, the police sergeant said: "I'll wait for you, Charlie, if you're not going to be long."

"Don't bother, Bert," Gray said. "I don't know how long I'll be. Thanks just the same."

The police sergeant stepped on the starter.

Charlie Gray climbed the stoop alone. He rang the bell marked "Belden." When there was no response, he rang again. The electric latch-release buzzed briefly. He pushed the door open. The buzzing stopped.

Behind him the starter of the police-sergeant's car was still grinding rhythmically, complainingly. Still holding the door knob, Gray called back over his shoulder: "Need any help, Bert?"

"Nope," said the sergeant, climbing out of the car to lift the hood. "It's that damn carburetter. I got to get it fixed so I won't have to tickle it twice a day."

Suddenly Gray noticed that the latch was buzzing again. A strange sensation chilled him when he realized that the hand of an old brass-pounder was buzzing the latch. He recognized the buzzes forming letters, the letters becoming the curt abbreviations of the professional wireless operator.

As a pre-occupied person can recall and fit meanings to words spoken seconds earlier, words he did not realize he had heard, so did Charlie Gray's mind go back and pick up the buzzed message from the beginning. Over the makeshift circuit had come words of warning: "Run. . . . Romer here . . . to kill you."

The buzzing stopped. Gray was stunned into immobility. He heard the motor of the car cough, stutter, then relax into a steady purr.

Gray turned suddenly. "Bert!" he called. "Come here! Quick!"

The police sergeant sprang from the car, ran up the steps. "What's up, Charlie?"

"A murder . . . I saw it. . . . The killer's upstairs."

"I'll call the precinct. We'll have the house surrounded."

"No time, Bert." Gray tugged at the sergeant's arm. "He's going to shoot me. He's up there now, waiting. . . ."

"Then come on. We'll bluff it."

Belden and Romer heard the quickening crescendo of feet running up the stairs. When it became evident that the footsteps belonged to more than one man, a puzzled frown creased Romer's narrow brow. His mouth opened and closed. He looked at Belden. Belden's face was expressionless.

A peremptory pounding on the door was followed by a thundering

command—not Gray's tremulous tenor but an organ-note bass—which obviously meant business:

"Come out of there, Romer. It's all over."

Romer half rose from his chair, then sank back. His lips were white, his face a greenish grey.

"Come out, Romer!" the bass voice repeated. "Come out with your hands high. There's no use shooting. The house is surrounded."

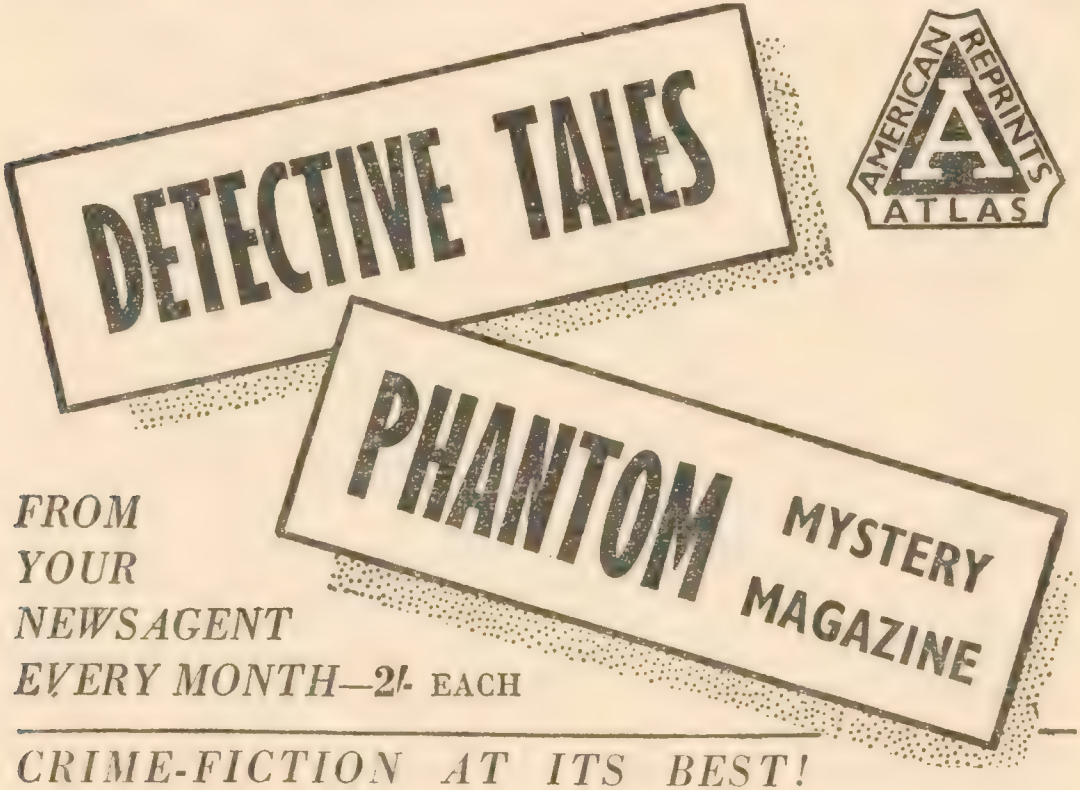
Romer's lips twitched. Dazed by the suddenness with which his own baited trap had snapped shut upon him, demoralized by his abrupt transformation from hunter to hunted, he said nothing.

There was an explosion. A shot crashed through the door. Broken plaster rained on Romer's head. The door gave way under the impact of cast-iron shoulders.

Romer jumped to his feet, screaming: "O.K., O.K.! I heard you! I'm coming, godammit!"

He staggered a little as he walked towards the door, hands raised.

Belden followed him. With his foot, he rolled the rug back into place.



E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM:

BLOOD-MONEY

THERE was something wrong with Mr. Billingham. For two days he had shown a marked lack of interest in his food, his drink and his gambling. The spring had laid its relaxing hand upon the hills and the little Principality; the sun had gained in strength, the flowers in the gardens were drooping, there were cracks in the smoothly shaven lawns, umbrellas at every table in the Café de Paris, and green verdure in place of the snows on the lower slopes of the mountains. Men were wearing flannels and straw hats, and some of the women had even ventured upon muslins. Mr. Billingham, however, seemed slow in responding to these genial signs of the advancing season. For several days he had shown a tendency almost to mope. The climax came when, at half an hour before his usual luncheon-time, he complained of his cocktail at Ciro's.

"*Mais comment, monsieur?*" the bartender exclaimed. "It is as I have always mixed it day by day for months."

"It tasted flat," Mr. Billingham pronounced—"Flat!"

There was nothing more to be said. The bartender withdrew with a pained look. The Marquis stared first at his friend's frosted glass, then at Mr. Billingham himself.

"My friend," he declared, "it is perhaps the liver. The cocktail is as always. The moment you enter the place Charles braces himself. You have even those much-to-be-treasured drops of absinthe at your disposal."

"It didn't taste good," Mr. Billingham insisted doggedly.

"We will try another," the Marquis suggested. "Charles! In case there should have been any slight discrepancy in the mixing, in case your elbow should have shaken with the angostura, your special attention, if you please."

Charles had scarcely recovered from his hurt, but he obeyed orders.

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He shook the cocktails himself in front of the two men and poured them out, waiting for the verdict. Mr. Billingham felt that he had perhaps been a little unreasonable.

"I guess the cocktail was all right, Charles," he admitted. "It's myself that's out of sorts."

Charles accepted the *amende* and withdrew. Mr. Billingham leaned forward and gripped his companion by the arm. His eyes were fixed upon two approaching figures.

"Say, Marquis," he demanded, "who the devil's the young man with Madelon?"

The Marquis adjusted his eyeglass and stared at the newcomers. Madelon was wearing a ravishing little gown of lemon-coloured linen, with an adorable little hat. Her companion was a tall, thin young Englishman in grey tweeds, who walked very slowly with the help of a stick.

"That is Captain Bruntingford," the Marquis answered. "Madelon introduced me to him last night."

"Know anything about him?" Mr. Billingham inquired.

"Nothing whatever," was the candid reply.

"Mademoiselle Madelon does, apparently, to judge from the way she's been going round with him the last few days," Mr. Billingham grunted.

The Marquis suddenly understood the cause of his friend's low spirits. Internally he amused himself; externally he remained placid.

"Madelon has, perhaps, an eye to business," her uncle remarked under his breath. "She is scarcely likely to find any other interest in the young man. Be careful! They arrive!"

Madelon entered the little glass-enclosed room with the sunshine streaming upon her hair, her eyes laughing, her step light and buoyant. She kissed her hand to Mr. Billingham, installed her companion in a chair and placed his stick by his side.

"Mr. Billingham," she said, "let me introduce you in the best American fashion. Shake hands, if you please, with Captain Bruntingford, late of the British Army. Uncle, you have met Captain Bruntingford. Mr. Billingham, will you order us some of those cocktails with a little froth at the top—or," she added, turning to the young man—

"I'd like a dry Martini, if I may," he begged.

Mr. Billingham gave the necessary orders. The little party joined forces. Mr. Billingham was prompt in extending an invitation to luncheon, but Madelon shook her head.

"I am lunching with Captain Bruntingford," she answered. "He would be quite polite if we turned it into a *partie carrée*, but he would

be very cross with me afterwards. Englishmen need so much humouring."

"Americans can get the needle sometimes," Mr. Billingham reminded her.

"Not wise Americans," she replied—"not really good and kind Americans, who like their friends to be happy and who trust them. Besides, Captain Bruntingford and I have serious matters to discuss."

The cocktails were drunk and approved. Madelon helped her companion out of his chair, gave him his stick and they departed. Mr. Billingham stared after them gloomily.

"Who the devil is this fellow Bruntingford?" he asked again.

"I expect Madelon will tell you presently," her uncle replied cautiously. "I know nothing about him myself. At the same time——"

"Well?"

"I do not fancy that Madelon is only amusing herself. She has, what you call, the eye to business, as we, too, upon occasion."

Mr. Billingham found the suggestion consoling. He was able, even, to find some slight interest in his luncheon. Afterwards Madelon unexpectedly joined them. They had the corner table on the terrace and she accepted a chair and some coffee. An older woman might have found the streaming sunshine disconcerting. It brought out the flecks of gold from Madelon's hair, but the faint violet lines under her eyes—perhaps a little more readily visible in the flood of light—were, owing to the freshness of her complexion, only intriguing.

"Tell us, my dear," the Marquis invited, "more of your friend, Captain Bruntingford."

Madelon shut her vanity case with a click.

"I like the type," she said, "and he orders the right sort of things to eat. He has just the right tone, too, with head-waiters. In short, I find him quite an agreeable companion."

"Is this sufficient," the Marquis ventured, "to account for the enthusiasm with which you have accepted his recent invitations?"

"Perhaps not altogether," she conceded. "You see, he was wounded in nineteen-fourteen, and afterwards he was attached to the Intelligence Department of the British Army. His section seems to have been broken up since the war and he has gone into partnership with a firm of private detectives."

The Marquis tapped a cigarette upon the table-cloth.

"Indeed," he murmured.

"That sounds kind of interesting," Mr. Billingham observed.

"He is out here," she continued, "on some sort of business for his firm. That is exactly as much as he has confided in me. I am beginning

to believe," she went on, with a sigh, "that it is as much as he means to tell me. And I am just a little curious."

Madelon paused for a moment. She was gazing out of the window through the dark green of the gardens, towards the stucco front of the Casino.

"Every afternoon," she proceeded, "he drives himself in a little two-seated car towards La Turbie; always in the same direction, always about the same hour. Another thing about that expedition rather interests me, too. Always, before he starts, he feels in his pocket to be sure that his revolver is there."

"But how observant!" the Marquis murmured.

Madelon shrugged her shoulders.

"The sort of grey tweed lounge suit which he wears," she said, "is not made for carrying things in the pocket of which you wish to conceal the shape. Then, there is one other somewhat singular circumstance. Although he is liberal with his invitations to me for luncheons, dinners and suppers, he has never once asked me to accompany him in that afternoon drive."

The Marquis smiled faintly.

"A little piqued!" he commented.

"Possibly," Madelon assented. "In any case it has occurred to me that it was my turn to bring something into the bag."

Mr. Billingham smoked serenely. He was feeling a little more content with life.

"There may not be room for us to butt in," he remarked. "He may be just collecting evidence in some divorce case. These detective agencies don't as a rule handle the big jobs."

"Nevertheless, I am intrigued," Madelon persisted. "There is much about Captain Bruntingford that interests me. Sometimes in the middle of a dinner or a luncheon I have seen a shadow pass over his face, and a light in his eyes as though there were something near which he feared. I have seen him start when someone has nearly run into us at a corner. I am sure that he is a brave man, yet I am sure that he has been living in fear."

"The remains of shell-shock, perhaps," Mr. Billingham speculated. "Has he taken that little red car out this afternoon?"

Madelon nodded.

"He has taken it out and gone just the same way—upon the route the cars take for La Turbie."

"It's a fine afternoon," Mr. Billingham said. "I'll hire an automobile and treat you to a spin. We'll go up to the Golf Club to tea."

Madelon hesitated, but it was obvious that the idea attracted her.

"I should love to come," she admitted. "Only, if we do happen to meet Captain Bruntingford in his red car, I hope he will not think that we are following him."

"It's an open road," Mr. Billingham reminded her, "and there are plenty of others upon it. We'll get a move on right away and see the sunset from the top."

The little party started within a quarter of an hour. They never reached La Turbie. About half-way up the narrow road which leads into the upper Corniche, just after negotiating a very awkward bend, they came upon an all too common sight in this region of mountainous roads and reckless driving. A little crowd of people were gathered on the edge of the precipitous slope. The remains of a small car lay upside-down, partially concealed by a huge volume of smoke and steam and with little flames bursting from the petrol tank. A few yards away something was stretched upon the ground, covered by a mackintosh sheet. Mr. Billingham touched the driver upon the arm, and by his directions the automobile was brought to an abrupt standstill.

"I shouldn't come on, Miss Madelon," he advised. "Let the chauffeur back with you to the corner. The Marquis and I will see if there is anything to be done."

Madelon was looking straight ahead of her. The colour had left her cheeks, but her voice was quite steady.

"The little red car!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Billingham nodded.

"I thought it might be," he assented. "I'm afraid by the way they've covered the body up there isn't much left of poor Captain Bruntingford."

Madelon half closed her eyes.

"I think perhaps you are right," she murmured. "Please come back to me soon."

The car was reversed slowly to the corner and left in a safe place. From below a large police motor van came tearing up the hill, and from above a doctor's automobile from La Turbie was winding its way to the scene of the disaster. Mr. Billingham and the Marquis joined the little crowd of people. No one seemed to know much of what had happened. The car had struck the low grey stone wall at the side of the road and turned over. The driver was apparently quite dead; his neck must have been broken.

"Better let me see," Mr. Billingham suggested. "I'm not a medical man, but I did a little amateur surgery in the war."

They made way for him and he lifted the waterproof cover. When,

a few moments later, he rose from his knees, most of his healthy colour had departed. The doctor from above and a police *commissaire* from below arrived almost together. Mr. Billingham took the Marquis by the arm and led him a little way down the hill. They could see the marks of the car, could see where it had apparently skidded and overturned. About twenty or thirty paces further on was a small villa, enclosed by a high wall of white plaster. Mr. Billingham looked at it speculatively. Then he looked back at the little group, at the police *commissaire* and the doctor, both bending over the prostrate form. An ambulance which had followed the police car was now drawn up.

"Guess there's nothing else we can do," Mr. Billingham said. "We'll get back to Miss Madelon."

They returned, Mr. Billingham thoughtful and curiously silent. The Marquis answered the inquiry in his niece's eyes with a grave little nod.

"A very serious affair, I am afraid, my dear," he told her kindly. "The car seems to have struck the wall, skidded, and overturned. Poor fellow! He is quite dead."

"How terrible!" Madelon murmured. "And how strange," she added, a moment later. "I saw him drive once or twice and I thought he was especially skilful. The roads are not slippery. Why should he skid?"

Mr. Billingham came back from his brown study.

"I should say," he remarked, "that it was not exactly a skid. He lost control of the machine."

"But why?" Madelon demanded.

Mr. Billingham pointed to the little pink villa behind the high, plastered wall.

"Because the poor fellow was shot—probably from that villa—on his way up the hill," he announced gravely. "Naturally he lost control of the car and over it went. As a matter of fact his neck was broken as well."

"You mean that he was murdered?" Madelon gasped.

"Not the slightest doubt about it," Mr. Billingham replied. "He was shot well on the left-hand side, and there seems to be no cover anywhere near except from that villa. I heard one of the labourers say that they heard the report of a tyre-burst. As a matter of fact it must have been the report of the rifle."

"Did you tell the *commissaire*?" Madelon asked, as they started off on their homeward journey.

Mr. Billingham shook his head.

"He didn't need any telling," he replied. "Neither he nor the doctor

can make any mistake about that. What I am curious about," he went on, "is just this. There's a heap of talk about the way accidents and sudden deaths and motor catastrophes are hushed up in this part of the world. Now we shall be able to judge for ourselves."

A few days later the very suave functionary who presided over the lives and liberties of the Monégasques received a call from Mr. Billingham. He welcomed him with cordiality.

"Official or unofficial?" was his first question.

Mr. Billingham considered the matter.

"Because," the other continued, "officially I can be dumb; unofficially I am able to remember that we are good friends, that you have done us services, that you are not one of these people who go about making trouble unnecessarily."

"My visit is unofficial," Mr. Billingham announced. "I came to ask whether you have formed any conclusions as to how that poor fellow came by his death—the fellow in the little red motor-car."

The police functionary shrugged his shoulders.

"Our roads are dangerous to those not accustomed to them," he declared.

"No one," Mr. Billingham retorted, "can drive a car successfully with a bullet wound in his heart."

The functionary stroked his chin.

"You noticed that, too?" he observed.

"I did," Mr. Billingham replied. "I also noticed that the only very brief report of the accident described it as being due to a skid and Captain Bruntingford's death due to a broken neck."

"His neck certainly was broken," the other remarked—"a sufficient cause of death, I think."

"Have you no curiosity," Mr. Billingham inquired, "as to the bullet wound?"

The other shook his head.

"We are never curious here about these things," he observed. "Besides, what good purpose is served by destroying what is after all an amiable fiction. It is better for the world to believe that this young man died of a broken neck through a motor accident than that he shot himself."

"Shot himself?" Mr. Billingham murmured. "Ah! . . . By the by, was the weapon found?"

"Not to my knowledge," the police functionary admitted. "To tell you the truth, I sent two men up to search, but they were unsuccessful. There were a good many men at work in the fields and on the roads,

and I am afraid that anything in the way of fire-arms is looked upon as a rather desirable acquisition amongst these people."

"I follow you," Mr. Billingham murmured. "You know that I am not a chatterbox. For the moment, nothing more! Oblige me with one piece of information."

"By all means."

"I should like the dossiers of the inmates of the little villa—'Les Mimosas' it is called—quite close to where the young man met with his accident."

The police functionary looked across at his visitor keenly.

"Why?" he demanded.

Mr. Billingham shrugged his shoulders.

"An idea," he replied.

"They shall be at your hotel within two hours," the other promised. "In the meantime——"

"We are of one mind," Mr. Billingham declared. "The young man must have friends, probably relations. Let it remain at a broken neck. But be sure I have my dossiers. There is one thing more, too. If any of Captain Bruntingford's business friends should come over from England, will you ask them to favour me with a call?"

"With pleasure," was the ready response.

It was one of the pleasing practices of Mr. Billingham's cleanly life to perform certain acrobatic exercises in his bathroom every morning. He was lying upon his back, pummelling his stomach with both fists and indulging at the same time in deep breathing, when a knock at the door, the next morning, disturbed his praiseworthy efforts at maintaining his physical condition.

"What is it?" he demanded, sitting up.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," was the floor-waiter's reply.

Mr. Billingham reflected for a moment.

"Show the gentleman into the *salon*," he directed, "and leave his card on my tea-tray."

The footsteps outside passed along. Mr. Billingham abandoned further attempts to reduce his girth and jumped into his bath. Five minutes later, with tousled hair and glowing face, he picked up the card which reposed upon his tray.

"*MR. JAMES H. BERRY.*"

And underneath, in small type—

"*Berry and Bruntingford,*
Private Inquiry Agency."

Mr. Billingham poured himself out a cup of tea and, with it in his hand, passed through to his *salon*. A small man, with sandy hair and an indifferent complexion, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles and obviously of furtive habits, rose to his feet as he entered.

"Mr. Billingham, sir," he said, "I fear that I have disturbed you too early."

"Don't you worry," was the cheerful reply. "We get up a trifle late here. Monte Carlo isn't New York, or London either for that matter. Glad to see you, sir."

He shook hands and waved his visitor to a chair.

"You are Captain Bruntingford's partner, I gather," he went on. "Terrible affair! What was the game out here, eh?"

Mr. Berry felt his breath being taken away. He removed his spectacles and polished them.

"I am very much disturbed, Mr. Billingham," he confided. "The news of this accident to Captain Bruntingford was a great shock."

"Accident?" Mr. Billingham repeated.

His visitor nodded gravely.

"He was, I understand, killed in a motor accident."

"I guess not," Mr. Billingham objected. "He was murdered."

The little man jumped almost out of his chair. Then he leaned forward and looked at Mr. Billingham, his hands gripping its sides.

"You don't mean that?" he gasped.

"I surely do," Mr. Billingham replied. "He was shot through the heart. That's how the motor accident happened."

There was no doubt about it that Mr. Berry was not only taken by surprise but that he was deeply moved. He dabbed his forehead with his handkerchief.

"I told Bruntingford," he declared, "that it wasn't our class of business. Too risky and not enough to it! He wouldn't listen to reason. Murdered! Good God! They didn't tell me this at the police station."

"They wouldn't," was the curt rejoinder. "Murders and suicides never happen in Monte Carlo—just accidents, that's all!"

"Well, well, well!" Mr. Berry exclaimed helplessly. "To think they'd go as far as that!"

"Who's 'they'?" Mr. Billingham demanded.

His visitor shivered.

"How much do you know?" he asked.

"Nothing," Mr. Billingham confessed.

"Where do you come in, then?" the other inquired, a little puzzled.

"I don't come in," Mr. Billingham admitted. "I want to. I should

like to take on Bruntingford's job—whatever it was. That is, unless you're going to take it on yourself?"

Mr. Berry dabbed his forehead again.

"Take it on myself!" he repeated. "I'd sooner starve first. It ain't my idea of pleasant business, sir, and that's a fact."

"No?" Mr. Billingham murmured sympathetically.

"Give me the makings of a divorce case, or the chance of collecting evidence in a slander job, or even a bit of blackmail, and I'm on the spot," Mr. Berry continued. "When it comes to these big things with desperate people up against one—well, all I say is 'take the job somewhere else.' It's what I told Bruntingford, only he wasn't having any. He'd got used to these tough affairs in the Army."

"Put me wise about this," Mr. Billingham begged. "I'm interested."

Mr. Berry cleared his throat. Somehow or other this powerful pink-and-white-looking man, in his bath robe, still glowing from his exercises, inspired him with confidence. He accepted a cigarette, and Mr. Billingham, after a moment's departure from the room, returned with another cup of tea, helped himself to a cigar, and, crossing his legs, settled down in an easy-chair, with a liberal display of underclothes.

"Bruntingford was after forty thousand pounds," Mr. Berry explained. "I never believed he'd get it, and he didn't. He got something else instead and it's my belief that the next person who goes after that forty thousand will get his the same way."

"What is it?" Mr. Billingham inquired. "Stolen money?"

"Blood-money!" was the hushed reply.

"You've got me guessing," Mr. Billingham confessed.

"Eh?"

"What kind of blood-money?"

Mr. Berry hitched his chair a little closer.

"The Johnny who first came to see Bruntingford," he confided, "was one of them foreign Jews, and he was marked down for trouble right enough. Never came except after dusk, and he was scared stiff if ever there was a footstep on the stairs. Got a cough, he had, too, enough to split him open. I didn't understand a word of their lingo. Bruntingford had to tell me afterwards. It seems the little chap was a Russian—had been in the police, and got into trouble. He bolted from Russia and brought some of the papers from headquarters with him. It was through these he got on to the game. The Russian Government, if there is such a thing, want that chap Kitilsky who ran things there for a bit after they wiped the Tsar out. He escaped when the Bolshevists took hold, but he's alive still and they want him."

"Why?" Mr. Billingham demanded.

"Got some papers, for one thing," Mr. Berry confided, "and they believe he knows where there's some stolen gold hidden. Anyhow, they want him bad. Ten thousand pounds reward they offered. The little chap, just before he hopped it, got on to the lay. He reckoned Kitilsky was living at a villa somewhere back of Monte Carlo. He daren't leave London himself, though, and daren't claim the reward. He wanted Bruntingford to take hold and see what arrangement he could make. He found most of the money and Bruntingford came out here. Looks as though he had discovered his man if your story's the truth."

"I guess that's so."

There was a moment's silence. Mr. Billingham proffered a cigar, which was promptly accepted.

"You going on with this show?" the latter inquired.

Mr. Berry hesitated. There was a cunning gleam in his eyes.

"I'm none too keen," he confessed. "I'd rather sell my share."

"Your share?"

"The reward."

Mr. Billingham smiled.

"You mean you'd like to get home with a sound skin."

"I was never one of the fighting sort," Mr. Berry admitted apologetically.

"I tell you what I'll do," Mr. Billingham suggested. "I'll look into this matter. I can't say I've got properly the hang of it yet, but I'd kinder like to say a word or two to some one in that villa."

"You're tackling it yourself?" Mr. Berry asked, with a shiver.

"I guess so," Mr. Billingham admitted. "I don't know as I see clearly as to the financial side of it yet, but I'll give you a third of anything I pick up."

"It's a go?" was the eager reply. "I'll stay here for a few days on the chance."

Mr. Berry brought his visit to a close. He looked around the room wonderingly.

"What are you taking this on for?" he demanded. "You seem to have plenty of the stuff already—living here like a prince!"

Mr. Billingham smiled.

"Appearances are sometimes deceptive," he confided, as he showed his guest out. "Besides, there is always the adventure!"

Mr. Billingham, later in the morning, drove up to the Villa des Mimosas in a closed car which he had hired in the Casino Square. He passed the crumpled-up remains of the little red automobile, and

descended in a few moments before a huge nail-studded door let into the plastered wall. He pushed down the iron handle with a jerk, but found, as he had expected, that it was fastened on the other side. Rather to his surprise, however, after scarcely a moment's delay a little click was heard and the door was released by means of a catch from within. He stepped into a narrow stretch of garden; uncared for and overgrown with weeds. The front door of the villa had been opened and upon the threshold a woman was standing. Mr. Billingham recognized her at once as an *habituée* of the Casino—a florid-looking woman with too much flesh, too much jewellery, ill-powdered and besmeared with rouge. She was untidily dressed. Her hair was tousled. There was a hole in her black felt slippers. After the somewhat tense sensations of his impending arrival, Mr. Billingham was conscious of a curious sense of something inadequate in the situation. His surprise was increased when the woman addressed him in English.

"Are you the English doctor?" she inquired.

"American," Mr. Billingham replied, with ready presence of mind.

"The same thing," she muttered. "Come in."

She closed the door carefully behind him. Mr. Billingham caught a glimpse of an unkempt-looking man securing the outside gate. The hall of the villa was dirty, ill-kept and almost devoid of furniture.

The woman paused there. She spoke in a hoarse, husky whisper.

"I don't know that you can do anything," she said. "It's about all up. He wouldn't have a doctor before, though. The only chance is you might be able to keep him going for a week or two."

"Let me see him," Mr. Billingham enjoined.

She opened one of the doors which led out of the hall. Mr. Billingham found himself in what might have once been the *salon* of the villa, but was now a nondescript apartment, containing only a few oddments of furniture, heavy with cigarette smoke, malodorous from the closed windows and reminiscences of past meals. Although it was a brilliantly sunny morning, a pair of shabby curtains were completely drawn—the light in the room was so dim, indeed, that Mr. Billingham nearly blinked. There was heat coming somewhere from a closed stove, and stretched upon a sofa by its side was the emaciated figure of a man wrapped in a dressing-gown. His throat was so skinny that its cords seemed to stand out almost singly. His deep sunken eyes were unnaturally large, brilliant with an uncanny light. His white face was disfigured by many days' growth of black and stubbly beard, his fingers were yellow with the stain of nicotine. By the side of his couch was a small table and a miniature roulette board. Close to it was the seat from which the woman had risen. By the side of the

roulette board was a strip of paper and a pencil. The man spoke to the woman in a language of which Mr. Billingham knew nothing, and pointed to her seat. She replied soothingly. He shook his head and broke out once more. Then he coughed. She leaned over and patted his shoulder.

"You had better wait for a moment," she said, turning to Mr. Billingham. "Every day we do this," she went on, pointing to the board. "We spin twenty numbers. I take the results down and go to the Casino and back the same numbers in the same order. It is the only thing which distracts his thoughts since he cannot go himself. We have finished seventeen. Will you wait?"

"I will wait," Mr. Billingham agreed.

The woman resumed her seat, threw in the ball and turned the wheel. The man leaned over, watching it eagerly. He took note of the number with a little air of satisfaction and muttered something, whilst the woman scribbled it down in pencil upon her list. Twice more the operation was repeated. Then the man leaned back. He spoke a few faint words; apparently in Russian. The woman appeared to assent and he closed his eyes. She drew Mr. Billingham a little on one side.

"He wants me to hurry off to the Casino," she explained. "He says if I do so he will let you examine him."

Mr. Billingham opened his mouth and closed it again. There were tears streaming down the woman's terrible face; a sob choked in her throat.

"I am afraid," Mr. Billingham began.

He stopped short. The door was opened. A man stood there; corpulent, unprepossessing. He wore only a pair of black trousers and a flannel shirt. He was the man who had closed the gate. He spoke to the woman; again in that incomprehensible jargon. She listened and turned towards Mr. Billingham. Her face had hardened, her tone was suspicious.

"There is a man here who says that he is the doctor," she announced.

"He is probably right," Mr. Billingham admitted.

"Who are you, then?" she demanded.

"I came to see who fired the shot from this villa which killed Bruntingford," Mr. Billingham declared, keeping his hand near his hip pocket and his eyes wandering from the woman to the man.

The woman's face had been terrible before, but something of real fury gave it for a moment almost a diabolical expression. Her lips were parted. She remained, however, unexpectedly silent. There was a moan—a low moan but ending in a still more terrible sound—from the man upon the couch.

"The doctor!" Mr. Billingham exclaimed.

She called out something to the servitor. A little dark man with a black bag entered. She pointed to the couch.

"Go out and wait," she ordered Mr. Billingham.

He went into the dirty hall and sat upon a crazy cane chair. The atmosphere of the place stifled him. Presently he withdrew the bolts from the big door and found his way out into the tangled wilderness of garden which still remained beautiful. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead and waited. It was probably half an hour before anything happened. Then the woman came out. She advanced slowly towards him, and Mr. Billingham—who had seldom known fear—was conscious of a strange new sensation in his veins; a feeling that the sun had passed from the heavens and that there was sulphur in the air.

"You came to find out who fired that shot," she said. "I did."

"Why?" he demanded.

"That he should end his days a free man," was the solemn answer. "That has arrived. Are you of the police? I am ready!"

Mr. Billingham shook his head.

"The police do not know," he assured her hoarsely. "What about him?"

"He is dead," she announced. "He died—just then."

Mr. Billingham twirled his hat in his hand. It was so sordid, incomprehensible, amazingly unreal. Through a little clump of olive trees, he saw that the gate remained open.

"My affair here is finished," he said. "I will go."

She nodded.

"Go!" she assented. . . . "You are fortunate," she added, a moment or two later, "that you did not come a few days ago with your question."

"You know, of course, that there was a great reward for information about him?"

"I have known it for years," she admitted. "Nevertheless I kept him hidden. We had always two foes to fight—spies and starvation."

"And now about yourself?" he asked.

She stared at him. Another button of her dress had given way. She seemed more ragged than ever.

"Myself!" she repeated. "What does it matter? He is dead!"

The time that knew the petulant-mouthed Robespierre, was a time of terror, singularly reminiscent of more recent and more familiar days. . . . It was a time of intrigue and of counter-intrigue, a time of considerable heroism and of a way of thinking which, in the years and in the decades which followed, many were to remember and—in time—emulate. . . . Cornell Woolrich, author of THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, PHANTOM LADY, *etc., etc., re-creates those days and those nights of sudden terror in the present story.*

Two Against The Terror

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

WHEN he saw the sun gone at last, and the long blue fingers of evening began to poke into the Palais Royal gardens; when he saw the little tables being withdrawn for the night, and the crowd of strollers began to thin out and start homeward, and the wink of candle-

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light began to show between the shutters here and there, Tom Crandall's long-sustained hopes were dashed at last, and he knew she wasn't coming any more.

One last time he paced about the grounds, miserable and without hope. Not disappointment alone, but a darker foreboding assailed him. If she were ill, she would have contrived to send the old woman to explain, he felt certain. What was it then?

The gardens were shadowed now; the evening star shone tranquilly above them. And it was too late to hope for her coming any more. He was nearly insane with the uncertainty of what to do next. He could not go back to his own hide-away without having seen her; he must know now. The only way, dangerous as it was, was to go to her dwelling place.

He set out at last, cursing himself for not having done so hours ago. It was pitch-dark already in the street labyrinths by the time he reached the entrance to the alley. The lanes here were too narrow, the houses too high, to let the fading glimmer of daylight through from the sky. He passed by slowly the first time, turning to look into it as he did so. Not fear for himself so much as risk of bringing down danger upon her by recklessly seeking her out ordered these precautions. The alley was empty, a tunnel of stillness. High up a window gleamed blurredly with candlelight, but it was not hers, it was on the wrong side of the way.

He turned, came slowly back again, choosing a moment when he was sure no one watched, he slipped into it. He found the doorway of her house, and in the sour odour of mouldy plaster and decay that came from it, he sickened at the thought that she must live here in hiding.

He met no one on the unlighted stairs, where he had to count his way up flight by flight in the darkness.

No gleam showed beneath her door when he finally located it. He listened for a long time. He heard talk and laughter from behind the other doors he had passed on his way up, but there was no sound here. He knocked finally, as quietly as he could manage so that the other people in the house would not hear. No answering footfall, nothing. There was only dead silence.

Standing there in the darkness, he felt his body go weak with fear. She was gone, and in the Paris of this hour that could mean something terrible. He tried to steady himself, but he knew that this fright was justified; for Paris was ruled by mad dogs—and she was their natural prey. She was the daughter of nobles.

He stood there, head bowed, looking down towards the floor. He'd

never loved before, he realized that now. He had never felt like this before. And he could do nothing; he could not hope to find her in the city's turmoil; he could only wait.

Suddenly, the fitful glint of an approaching light began washing the walls from below, and there was the shuffle of ascending footsteps. He shifted quickly over to the handrail, peered downward through the hollowed square of the staircase-structure. It was the dejected figure of a solitary old woman, creeping upward, stopping at every step or two to rest and to sob. He knew her by her black garb.

He waited where he was. Then as she began painfully to clamber the last flight, he called her name softly in warning, so he wouldn't frighten her into some betraying exclamation. "Fernande. It's me, Fernande."

She stopped, looked uncertainly about her. "Who calls Fernande?" Then as he came down into sight from above: "You again?" She dropped one arm resignedly to her side with a little slap. "Well, come here all you want. Come looking. You will not find her."

He caught her roughly by the arm. "What do you mean? What has happened to her?"

"Cannot you guess, must you be told?" she whispered fiercely.

And that was the answer! He knew that what he had feared, had happened.

His face became a white blur in the gloom as her light fell across it. "Don't stand there. Is your tongue gone? Where is she? Where?"

"Saint-Lazare Prison," she answered sepulchrally. "Under sentence of death to the guillotine."

The room was underground and held no windows. The low ceiling was mottled green in patches with age-old damp. The floor was blocks of stone. The doorway was barred with iron, and on the outside, at the foot of the stone steps that curved down from above, a guard with a musket over his shoulder paced endlessly back and forth. There was sufficient food and wine on the long planks stretched above casks that formed the dinner-table, but it was coarse and simple, served in earthenware and wooden platters. And those who were dining together were shabbily and incongruously attired.

It was the common-room of Saint-Lazare Prison, in which the prisoners, men and women alike, came together twice a day: in the mornings to hear the roll call of the condemned, and in the evenings—those who had survived until the next day—to have their meal together.

Philippine de Sancy was seated midway along the table—for etiquette ruled here as rigidly as it ever had at Versailles, and those of greatest

rank were towards the head of the table, and those of lesser rank were restricted to the foot of the table—between a youth of twenty-two, a mere boy, and a corpulent roué of sixty, who kept up an incessant ogling and made clumsy attempts to arrange a rendezvous—in a place where the only rendezvous was with death.

She stood him as well as she could, laughing all the while, but she determined none the less to make sure, if he survived another day and she did too, that she had another seat and another neighbour at to-morrow evening's board. But at least he served to keep her mind off her present pass.

"De Sancy! Philippine de Sancy!" called a harsh voice from outside the bars. "Someone to see you."

Philippine looked around. Fernande was standing there with her face pressed close to the barrier, peeping through at her with streaming eyes. Philippine jumped up, ran over with an exclamation of delight, and they embraced as best they could through the bars. Then the girl drew slightly back again in alarmed afterthought. "You too, my poor Fernande?" she asked ruefully.

"No, I come on a visit."

"They allow that? It's the first I know of it—"

The old woman turned to the guard who had accompanied her down. "Am I not allowed to enter?"

"I have no order—"

"Read them on this special entry-permit, then," snapped the old woman, producing a document. The gate was opened for her and she came in, drawing the prisoner out of earshot into a secluded corner.

"Did you take back my reply to Dunot?" Philippine whispered eagerly. "What does he say? Have you an answer?"

"Yes, but not on paper. It is too dangerous; after all, he works for the Committee of Public Safety and you are a condemned aristocrat. I bring it by word of mouth. His head is turned like a schoolboy's at the thought that you consent to accept his offer of 'protection'."

"*Canaille!*" the girl said scornfully, deep in her throat.

"The answer is: 'Tomorrow night!' Tomorrow night he sends for you on the pretext of questioning you further. You are to be taken to his private apartments. Once out of here it will be easy for him to pretend there has been a miscarriage of justice, drop a word to Fouquier-Tinville himself and have your name cancelled from the death-list. Of course, in return for that, he expects you to accept the shelter of his roof—"

"Yes," said the girl bitterly, "until he tires of me and a new face comes along. Then he'll throw me back into the tumbril! Two can play

at that game of double-dealing, don't forget. I'm only using him to get out of this living tomb. Once I'm on the outside, my American will do the rest."

"But how can *he* be of help? He's wanted by them, too, there's a price on his own head."

The girl tossed her head defiantly. "He's in love with me, and I am with him. And love has courage enough to do anything. The angels are on its side. Listen to me, my Fernande. Go find him. Tell him they're taking me to Dunot tomorrow night; that at midnight I shall be alone in his apartments. The rest I leave to him, he'll know what to do. Now, hasten; go to the Palais Royal gardens, look about carefully, and you'll see him there. It used to be our meeting place before my arrest, and I have no doubt he goes back there still, hoping for some word of me. And on your life, be careful."

The faithful old woman, who had been her nurse in childhood, gave her a look of affection, stooped suddenly and kissed her hand. "God will watch over you, my baby. You are too beautiful to die."

"Or too much in love," the girl said with a faint smile, "to want to just yet."

She was pacing back and forth, alone at the far end of the room, the next evening, when an elderly nobleman named Villeneuf, after watching her for some time, at last approached her. "Something troubles you, my child," he said sympathetically. "I have no wish to intrude, but if it will ease your mind, consider me a father as I would you a daughter. You could not touch your food tonight, your mind strayed, you did not keep it on the conversation; I do not like to see you thus."

"I know they think I'm a coward, they think it is fear of approaching death that has affected me in this manner. But it is not that, I ask you to believe me."

"I know it is not that. It is some plot to free you that is afoot, and as the moment approaches the suspense becomes unendurable. Isn't that so?"

She looked at him in surprise. "How did you guess?"

He shrugged. "The way you whispered with your serving-woman in the corner last night, these messages back and forth during the day—"

She hesitated, then blurted out: "In a few minutes they are coming to lead me to Dunot's house. What pretext he will give the prison officials here I don't know, but he is of the Committee of Public Safety, he is their superior and they cannot refuse his order. And my courage fails me.

"But why are you being separated from us at this hour of the night?"

She hung her head. "Because I wrote him, this Dunot, accepting his offered protection, in return for my life. There is a young man I love—an American—and I have hopes that—but now that the moment is at hand, I feel as if an abyss were opening at my feet. I don't know what to do."

He looked cautiously around, lowered his voice. "Take courage, don't be afraid to go to the rendezvous. Assuredly you will be led forth on foot by no more than one or two guards, and undoubtedly he will attempt to free you on the way between here and there. Can you not see that?" He patted her hand between his. "Have confidence in your young man, Philippine. You will live. You will escape. And so certain am I of this, I am going to give you a parting gift, a dowry that will help make your future more comfortable once you succeed in crossing the frontier. Take this."

Keeping his back turned, to the rest, he fumbled in his shirt and brought forth a little soiled ball of rag which he pressed into her hand.

She opened it slightly and peered at what was hidden in it. It was a diamond of almost incredible size and sparkle. She quickly covered it again, tried to pass it back to him. "But this must be priceless! Oh, monsieur, I cannot."

He warded it off. "It is of no use to me, little Philippine. I am an old man. I am under sentence of death passed by a far greater tribunal than theirs—the laws of morality.

"I have had it hidden in my cell, under the straw," he went on, "since I have been here. It was all I had time to take with me, of our family jewels, when they came to arrest me. I only brought it along hoping to buy my own daughter's life with it, but before I had a chance to do anything, they called her name and took her away in the tumbril." He sighed. "Eighteen years old. I have had no further interest in it since then."

They had been so taken up they had not seen the soldiers come down the steps. A harsh voice rasped through the bars: "Citizeness de Sancy, small-named Philippine. Daughter of an aristocrat, and of an aristocrat's wife, and therefore an enemy of the people. Stand forth for removal!"

Keys clashed, and an arm curtly beckoned her out.

She hastily thrust the object Villeneuf had just given her down the bosom of her dress, and turned a stricken face towards him. She clung to his coat with both hands in panic, desperately unwilling to go.

He gently disengaged them, stroked them like a father, to calm her.

"Pray for me, m'sieu!" she said in a voice that was almost a sob.

He kissed her benevolently on the forehead, then put his hands upon

her shoulders and gently turned her towards them, at the same time inclining his own head a little to murmur close to her ear:

"Have courage Philippine, little frightened girl. Go forward and face your fate. If it is to live, then your fears were a waste of time—and you will know it after. If it is to die, then your fears were a waste of time—and you won't know it after. That is the only difference. I sometimes think that the finest thing there is in life—is death."

He was at a large desk, Dunot, quill in hand, making great show of being busy at a vast litter of papers. She had an impression, though, by the disturbed slant of the drapes at the windows, that he had been at them more than once, peering forth to watch for her arrival. He had been having some experimental traffic with pomades and cologne-water in expectation of her coming, judging by the aromatic welter that emanated from his poorly-shaven jaws and dank hair. There was brandy in it somewhere, too.

He did not look up for an instant or two, then when he did, it was at the subaltern, not at her.

"Well?"

"The commandant at Saint-Lazare ordered me to bring this woman before you."

Dunot riffled the papers before him, as if in search of the pertinent document. "Here it is. Ah yes, I remember. A re-examination of the charges on which she was arrested and tried. You may leave her here in my custody." Very business-like, still without seeming aware that the subject of discussion was present in the room at all. "Report back to your commandant that your mission has been discharged. I will turn in my findings direct to the Committee myself, and of course be responsible for the prisoner's safekeeping until final disposition is made of the case." And to her, brusquely and still without looking at her, "Sit down, prisoner, until I am ready to attend to you."

She lowered herself uneasily to the very outermost edge of the chair, stiff as an automaton. The subaltern remained standing there questioningly.

The pre-occupied Dunot looked up at him. "Well, what is it?"

"May I have a voucher acknowledging safe-delivery of the prisoner? I do not want to be responsible, citizen."

"You want a receipt, is that it? Here." Dunot scrawled out something, handed it to him. The man saluted, turned and left the room, not without a sidelong glance at the girl and a knowing grin. Her face flamed and she thrust out her chin, but she kept her eyes lowered.

The door closed. Dunot raised his head now, sat there looking at

her intently across the desk. Her heart seemed to swell until it impeded her breath. He spoke at last. "Well, how did you like Saint-Lazare?" She looked at him without answering.

"Well, at any rate—" He made a gesture of dismissal. "It is better to be here than Saint-Lazare, isn't it?"

The outer courtyard gate clashed distantly shut after her departing ex-escort. That, apparently was what he had been waiting for. He threw down the quill he had been fiddling with, stood up, came out from behind the desk, and planted himself before her. "A drink," he suggested, "to take the prison chill out of your little bones?"

She managed to nod her head affirmatively. Anything to gain time. Though what was the sense of playing games out any further? She was cooped up in here now, beyond reach of Crandall, and in a far worse pass than she had been in the prison. She kept playing for time, touched her lips to the wine he poured for her, while his shadow fell across it, poisoning it. His hand dropped to her shoulder.

She shrugged it off, but almost unnoticeably so, dipping so that the paw seemed to fall of its own weight. It dropped only to a familiar position; clasped her clumsily about the waist and drew her to her feet.

She stepped back beyond it. Seizing any excuse, the first that came to mind, she said in a quick, panting voice: "I am ashamed of these rags I wear; I wish you could see me at my best." And eyes desperately roving the room, "There is, I suppose no hope of making myself more presentable—for you?" She practically had to force the last out through her teeth, but he was no connoisseur of nuances.

The idea seemed to flatter him. "Barmaid or marquise, you are all the same. You must deck yourselves out for us. Well, go inside then, if you must." He motioned towards a gilt and white door leading to the next room.

She threw him a watery smile to ward him off, a hasty "Give me just a moment at the glass," and close the door full in his face. The gesture was enough to deter him for a moment. She could hear the ring of glass as he poured himself another brandy.

She distractedly looked about her, like something wild trapped in a snare. It had been a boudoir, when all this place was one vast mansion. Candles were lit in readiness—and she thought of a funeral and worse, at what they indicated. His red Phrygian cape stood on an old wig-rest.

But she had eyes only for that deep-set window embrasure covered only by two interfolded velvet drapes. Even though it looked out only on the same locked, guarded inner courtyard they had just led her through, anything was better than remaining passive here awaiting the ominous turning of that doorknob behind her. The sentry had a

musket, after all; if she seized it suddenly before he could guess her intent—

She hastened towards the drapes with an audible sob. "Oh, if Crandall were only at hand—"

"I am. What did you think, I'd be very far away?" A hand thrust through and sealed the inadvertent scream upon her lips before it could sound, and then the drapes parted and he was before her eyes there, bared sword at hand.

Somehow the shoulder that had just now thrust off the touch of Dunot's hand wormed its way unasked into the curve of his arm and remained there. He pressed his lips briefly but reassuringly to hers.

"Tom, how did you get in here?"

"I've been lurking since before sundown in a vacant chamber in the other wing. I passed through the main gate unnoted in the midst of a group that came to petition one of their other great men who lodges on the premises. The window frame to this chamber was warped, luckily; I raised the latch with my sword."

"How are we to get out of here, Toam?" she whispered, standing close behind him. The foreign name sat quaintly on her lips.

"He must be dealt with first, Philippine. There is no other feasible way out but by the front gate. There is a carriage waiting in a certain lane close by to take us to the frontier, and a friend has readied false papers for us to travel under. But if this Revolutionary pig remains behind to give the alarm, that shortens our head start too greatly. It is his life, or ours."

"Deal then, Toam," she said firmly.

"Where is he? Outside that door?" A second chink of the brandy glass from out there answered the question. He went towards it noiselessly, sword swaying in readiness in hand. He turned the doorknob. She shrank back against the far wall, as if Dunot had power even yet to terrify her.

Dunot's voice sounded in answer to the swinging out of the door. "Ah, you have done at last? I thought you'd never come forth."

Crandall threw the door wide open, and as he advanced on him answered: "No, she sends her regrets; I come out to give them to you."

There was a hoarse exclamation from Dunot, and the crash of a dropped brandy glass. Then a chair went over. Then there came a spatter of running feet, as if someone was seeking to escape around the large desk, with other, faster feet in pursuit. A suddenly stifled shout for help, that died before it was born. A gasp, a heavy fall, a brooding stillness.

But she could stand no more. The thought that it might be Crandall,

not the other, terrified her to the point of rushing in there headlong.

It wasn't, it was—the one it should have been. Her heart breathed again.

Dunot lay sprawled, shoulders flat on the floor, head reared upright against the side of the desk. He had already been thrust through once, on the left side; blood was seeping through his shirt. His eyes goggled downward in horror at the point of Crandall's sword, poised at his heart. The short-arm that he hadn't had a chance to use lay on the carpet a few feet away, cocked at the ready but knocked from his hand by Crandall's sword.

Crandall turned to look at her in curt inquiry. "Yes or no?"

"You be the one to say," she answered.

He drew the sword back from pointing-position to thrusting one. "Turn your head away, then. They have slaughtered innocent men and women by the score, he and his kind."

It was over in a minute, and without a sound. When she looked again, Dunot's position hadn't changed in the slightest, but the blood was coming out from over his heart now, Crandall was wiping off his sword.

She hastened about, immediately, snuffing the candles, until no light was left but what filtered in through the windows from the courtyard. He held the outside door cautiously open, peering forth.

It was done now. They were outlaws of the Revolution. The whole nation would hunt them down. They would be torn to pieces if they were caught.

He transferred the key to the outside of the door, and after she passed through, locked the place up. They took a few tentative, stealthy steps out into the open space of the great courtyard, sidling close beside the wall. They could make out the sentry at its other end, passing to and fro against the grilled gate. Crandall had his sword held flat against him, pointing downward, under the coat he had borrowed from Dunot —so that it could not be seen, for Dunot himself carried none—but yet might be quickly used if called for. To do anything with a pistol would have been fatal, brought the whole place down about their ears.

As they stepped out of the shadow of the building-wing into the paler light of the centre of the court, he warned beneath his breath: "I am Dunot taking you over to the Committee or back to Saint-Lazare, it matters not; play the resisting prisoner, so he has no leisure to note us too well."

"Sweet captivity," she found time to murmur.

He took her roughly by the arm, and as they came before the gate

she flounced this way and that, so that the swirl of her skirts blurred his natural gait, which was not Dunot's. The lone night-sentry had halted in his paces at the writhing sight they made. Crandall kept his full-face turned sidewise to him, as if engaged in mastering her, so that the man got no very good look at him from the front, saw only the loosely-tumbling liberty cap.

"Open up!" huffed Crandall, keeping full pitch from his voice as if breathless with the task of managing her, "That I may get this aristo hell-cat off my hands!"

"Citizen Dunot," she wailed shrilly, drowning him out, "don't take me over there, I beg of you!"

The man drew out the bolt, swung the gate-half back for them. They threshed through cavorting as in a drunken dance. Yet his eye must have fallen on Dunot's coat in that instant. "You're hurt, citizen! There's blood on your coat-facing."

Philippine quickly took up the cue, wedging herself between them as if beside herself. "Aye, I did that with a bodkin, defending myself against his unwelcome attentions, and I'd do it again! All was not official questioning within, I'd have you know!"

The supposed Dunot pulled her after him down the road by main force, head averted as if embarrassed at being thus worsted. She made loud clamour at every step, yet not too loud, not loud enough to bring others down about their ears. Behind them they could hear the sentry trying to muffle his laughter as he crashed the gate closed once more.

A moment more they kept at their bickering, then a turn below, as Dunot's lodgings on the Street of the Supreme Being were left behind, they stopped short, drew a deep breath together.

"One hazard less," said Crandall, "of the many we face between here and Brussels. They are not a very clever lot, this Revolutionary militia."

"Where was it to wait?" she asked.

"A few turnings below here, in a dark lane beside the former Convent of the Carmelites. The building is untenanted now, and windowless as well, so the carriage's long halt there will be safe from observation. We travel as Etienne and Juliette Carpentier, husband and wife, of the tradesman class. I beg you to forgive the liberty."

"It is indeed a liberty," she murmured as she hurried along beside him. "But you could make amends easily enough in Brussels. The churches are still open there."

He nearly halted in his tracks with joyous surprise. "Philippine, you mean you really would—?

"First the carriage," she said demurely. "One bridge at a time."

It was there, in the darkness of the narrow street, standing close up

against the wall. A figure that must have been watching for them from a doorway suddenly stepped forth and startled her so that she shrank against Crandall.

His face was shadowed by his hat and Philippine couldn't make it out; the voice was that of a cultured man, but he spoke with a trace of foreigness like Crandall himself did. "I almost gave you up for lost. Twice the watch has come up to question us, and I bought them off. As assignation with a lady, I said. Here are your papers—the signatures are forged, but they're not likely to detect that at a hasty glance. Most of these Revolutionary officials can scarcely write their own names. Don't say, when you're questioned your destination is the frontier. Any mention of that awakes their immediate suspicions these days. You and your 'wife' are going to her dying mother's bedside in some country town; that is your story, that will explain your leaving Paris at this hour of the night. As you know, the city gates are closed after sundown to all ordinary travellers.

"Relays of fresh horses await you twice, at Amiens and again at Valenciennes; I sent a man out ahead this afternoon to make the arrangements. The coachman is dull-witted, but to be trusted. Do you know of some inconspicuous village lying towards the border you can name as your goal if pressed?"

"No," Crandall admitted. "Do you?"

"Unfortunately I am not familiar with the north country. Invent one then, that will be safer."

Philippine's hand strayed to her bosom, where Villeneuf's diamond lay concealed. "Grand-pierre*," she improvised at random.

"Good enough, that will do. Now Godspeed to you both."

Crandall gripped him gratefully by the arm, without a word. Then he helped Philippine up and followed her into the carriage.

A whip snapped, the horses started up, and they lumbered off through the narrow passage, scraping the walls. The long journey had started.

There was a hooded travelling-cloak for her on the seat. She donned it and hid the garb she had worn at Saint-Lazare, though this last was no characteristic uniform. Crandall took off Dunot's green coat, which he had put on over his own, rolled it up, opened the door slightly, and watching his opportunity, thrust it out upon the roadway behind them. Then he snatched the liberty-cap off his head with a chin-pucker of indignant disgust.

"Don't ask me to keep that on another minute," he said, irritably scratching his fingers into his hair. "It's not politics I object to, it's its

* "Large stone."

population!" He threw it out after the coat and vigorously brushed his hands out the door.

"Who was the man who did so much for us?"

"An American, like myself, whose sense of fair play makes him run these hazards. I met him by chance, and he knew me by my accent for a fellow-countryman. Who he is, even what his name is, I know not. But there are brave men in every age whose names never reach the page of the history-book."

"I'll say a prayer for him each night I live," she vowed.

"One thing he said to me, I now recall. 'It was not this *canaille* who shed their blood for us in our own revolution awhile back, it was these very aristocrats they now hunt down like animals. Is it not our turn to help them if we can?' "

"I never thought of that," she murmured. "It is so."

A smart fifteen-minute gallop brought them to the gate leading out to the Compiegne road. She shrank closer to him as the vehicle slackened. They both stopped breathing as it came to a final halt, a snort from one of their steeds' nostrils to punctuate it.

A moment passed, drawn out long as the wool for a housewife's knitting. Then a sergeant emerged from the guardhouse. A lantern splashed the black air with thin orange blood. A second man appeared, a third. The outside of the carriage became a pyre, as though phantom flames were licking at it. The door was roughly jolted open, and scowling faces looked in at them in the ruddy coruscation.

"I have special authorization here from Fouquier-Tinville." Crandall spoke a name high up in the Revolutionary ranks. "It's a matter of life and death, citizen."

Eyes peered at the paper suspiciously, while not a breath stirred within the carriage.

"Is that Fouquier-Tinville's writing?" one man asked the other uncertainly. "It dances so in this flickering light I can't be sure; it won't hold still at all."

The second one scratched his chin, his crown, the back of his neck, anxious to show superior knowledge when thus deferred to, but plainly unable to.

Crandall smote at his knee in a feigned huff, turned exasperatedly to the girl shrinking against him. "Did you ever see the like of this? They don't even know the great patriot's signature! Were I to tell him of this—"

This hypnotized the undecided one who had done the scratching into belief, though he knew no more than before. "It's his, all right," he now confirmed, handing it back. "I recognize it now. Don't you

recall that proclamation we had to put up the other day? It was alike to this."

"Is it still affixed? Go and match them against one another," ordered the sergeant. "It will take but a moment, and it's best to be doubly sure."

Crandall could feel Philippine's form shudder against his own, as the man strode off on his errand with one of the two lanterns. He reached for her hand, pressed it encouragingly, breathed into her ear: "Courage. Don't give up hope yet."

The sergeant was addressing them again. "What's this urgent matter that takes you out of the city at such an hour?"

"My wife's mother lies at the point of death."

"At Grandpierre," hastily interjected Philippine, keeping her face averted.

"Ho!" He threw his head back and laughed. "You are the first man I ever met to value a mother-in-law so highly!"

"Oh, how brutal! My poor Mama!" Philippine whimpered, rolling her head from side to side in simulated desolation against the turn of his shoulder.

Lanternshine ricocheted along the cobblestones towards them, a core of light like a livid egg-yolk came looming through the murky dark, and the other soldier returned from his mission of comparing signatures.

He set the lantern down, and its soap-bubble-like nimbus contracted to sharp-defined clarity.

"Well?" demanded the sergeant. Crandall could feel Philippine's nails dig into his arm, like a little mouth with five teeth supplicating his help.

The soldier gestured at both arms' width, their document in his hand. "You remember how it rained two nights ago? I forgot that, didn't you?"

"Pitchforks," said the sergeant.

"We should have put a little frame around the *affiche* to protect it. That signature is just stripes down the wall. Completely washed out."

"It looks like the other," insisted the one who had first been asked for corroboration. Having once given it, he was loath to retract it again and be discredited.

Crandall struck while the iron was hot. He raised his voice to Philippine. "Let's go straight back and report this. In the end that will be the quickest way. We can find him at his house."

She was quick to follow the tack he had taken. "But he'll be asleep at this hour," she protested, also in a higher voice than a conversation within the narrow confines of a carriage would have seemed to warrant.

"Let them be blamed for awakening him then, not us!" said the indignant Crandall.

The sergeant thrust their disputed document in through the carriage door at them with a gesture so hasty it might have been almost said he speared or lanced it at them. "Credentials in order," he said. "Pass on!"

"Coachman," relayed Crandall, still with an injured air, "You heard the soldier."

The traces gave a preliminary creak as they prepared to move on again.

The sergeant was now as anxious to be rid of them as he had been before to detain them. "Don't stand there. Open the barrier. Let them through," he fretted.

A moment later the old medieval city-wall of Paris, squat and bulky, had swept by over their heads and they were on the outside, in the open country, careening down the long grey Compiegne road, free under the shimmering stars. He saw her gaze up at them and make the sign of the cross with exhausted fervour.

She looked back to where the city dwindled, lantern-sparked, into the receding black masses of the night. "Good-bye to Paris," she murmured softly. "Paris, that eats its own children. Paris, forever good-bye."

Tears came to her eyes, but only briefly. It is hard to leave one's birthplace behind.

He drew his arm consolingly about her. "We're free. No more prisons. We'll build a new little Paris of our own somewhere, just the two of us, you and I."

And overcome by the strange new emotion of freedom and the familiar old one of love for her, mingled like wine, he bent his face and pressed his lips upon hers, and they melted together in the gloom of the rocking carriage.

The first outward-spreading ripple of the alarm sent out in ever-widening circles with the discovery of Dunot's murdered body at its boiling centre, overtook and passed them before the sun was well-up in the sky—hours before they expected it to. A puff of dust on the road behind them, small at first, swelled to the size of a low-speeding cloud, and then as it caught up with them burst into two streaking horsemen. The first flashed by with just a look and gesture towards them, to indicate them to his partner. The latter wheeled, drew in towards them, horse foaming at the bit.

"Steady," Crandall breathed reassuringly to the girl at his side. "This will be easily managed." He had the sword hidden lengthwise along the cushion of the seat, ready to be seized and drawn as a last resort. But he pretended to be yawning sleepily as the rider motioned

their coachman to draw up, leaned down and peered in through the dusty window. The horseman caught at the door-handle and pulled it open, without dismounting. Philippine sneezed at the dust from his head-long arrival as it filtered in.

"*De quoi s'agit-il?*" Crandall asked. "What's this about?"

"How long have you been on this road?"

"Why, ever since Paris," said Crandall, as if to say, "What a stupid question. Where else does it come from?"

"Who are you?"

"Carpentier and wife. We go to Grandpierre."

"Papers?"

"Here. In order as you see." The special permit to pass the city gate after-hours had been discarded by now, since it had served its purpose and little people such as they were supposed to be would not have been likely to obtain such a thing.

He scanned them narrowly, handed them back. "Has anyone passed you on this road, going your way but in haste as if fleeing? Quite a large party perhaps?"

"During the night we both slept and therefore cannot say. Who are you after, still more of these damned royalists? I thought they were all swept up by now."

"I don't discuss my orders with every chance passerby," said the man gruffly as he clattered off once more. His figure dwindled in the distance, to spread the alarm ahead.

Crandall turned back to her, but the glint in his eyes was a morose one. "I didn't expect the news to be out so soon. We may scrape through yet, but now all the towns ahead are forewarned."

"They must have found him last night already, right after we left," she said with a shiver. "Maybe we shouldn't have done it."

"We had to. The first law in life is self-preservation."

At one in the afternoon they trundled into the old cathedral town where their first change of horses awaited them. And high time too, for those that had brought them this far were staggering with weariness. The little inn where they rested briefly and partook of bread, cheese and red wine while the harnessing was being effected was agog with the news spread by the outriders.

"I saw them, I am sure I saw them!" the stout innkeeper's wife was telling to all who would listen. "At least a half-dozen galloped by here without drawing rein, just after sun-up."

"A half-dozen?" Crandall raised his brow privately for Philippine's benefit. "What did they look like?" he asked bolding, chiming into the gossip from where they sat munching.

"Well—actually I only *heard* them go by," she corrected herself. "I was at the back getting the fire ready, and by the time I had come out to the road, there was only the dust they had raised in passing. But I know it was they, it must have been! Who else goes by us here without stopping?"

He wanted to say, "Then if you didn't see them, how do you know there were a half-dozen?" but it was too risky to press the point.

As they set out again, the town faded behind them in the tawny noon-time haze, Philippine said: "This miracle of immunity continues as though an angel had us under his wing! How long do you think we can count on it?"

"As long as God wills," was his answer in the flowery language of the time, "and not one moment longer."

Twice more before evening they were overhauled by speeding emissaries of arrest, the first time a sizable group, the second time almost a full squadron. Their numbers noticeably kept growing, and that wasn't a good omen. Dunot's fellow members of the Committee of Public Safety had evidently been goaded to fury by his slaying, and they would not rest until they had the slayers back to wreak their retribution. They must have sent out squads in all directions; northward along the Channel road, but that was blocked by La Manche and ships were closely watched at all times; due east by Rheims to Strasbourg and the Rhine; southward along the Rhone Valley to the Savoy border; and south-by-west towards Spain, which was the longest and the least likely of the lot. But the road they were on now, he knew as well as they did, was the shortest route out of France, and the likeliest to be followed. Anyone who had ever successfully escaped from the Terror had done it by this road.

Again their papers were shown, again they were closely questioned—each time more closely—and again they were exonerated of suspicion and allowed to continue unimpeded on their way. They had, of course, in self-defence set back the time of their quitting the city to the afternoon before; it would have brought almost inevitable arrest to have admitted leaving when they had, now. And they had made such good time, that anyone would have found it hard to believe they had covered all this distance in the shorter span of time, in such a lumbering conveyance.

All through the waning afternoon, the twilight, and the early hours of the night the wheels raced endlessly beneath them, bringing safety nearer at every league, every sleeping hamlet they passed through unopposed, every turning of the road. They spoke very little; they'd have all their lives to speak of this afterward, they lived it now. An occasional protective clasp of his hand on hers, an occasional under-

standing look as they cleared the further outskirts of some little town, an occasional sip of the flask of water they had brought with them from the Amiens inn, an occasional murmured "Are you tired, *mon amour*? Lean back on me. Rest." This was the sum and total of their communication.

An hour before midnight they rolled into Valenciennes, sleeping under a milky moon, their last stop on French soil, and found their second and final change of horses waiting for them in the stable of the main inn. They roused the keeper, and sat in the corner of the kitchen, eating his hastily warmed-over rabbit ragout and wiping their platters with bread. "Grandpierre?" He scratched his head. "I never heard of it, but then I am not much-travelled."

"Are you too tired with this long riding to go on at once?" Crandall whispered anxiously to her when the man had turned his back. "Or would you rather we stopped here until daybreak?"

"Oh no, let's be on our way," she pleaded fearfully. "We're so close to safety now it would be tempting fate to delay. Besides, it would look strange to insist on two separate chambers, and yet my conscience forbids I bed down with you until we're man and wife."

"I favour going on, myself," he admitted. "It was just that I didn't want to tax you too hard."

"I'm not wearied," was her winning answer. "I ride in good hands and for a good cause; for the sake of my life and for the sake of my love."

They paid for their food and stabling, went outside and re-entered the freshly harnessed carriage, and the night-shirted innkeeper saw them off from his door, candle in one hand, stifling a yawn with the other.

All through the small hours of the night they rode the roads, and never once met anyone to stop them. All Revolutionary France seemed asleep. The dawn came up steely-blue around them, and on their right, now first revealed by its light, ran a broad sluggish river between flat banks, parallel to the road.

"Look," Philippine cried. "What's that called?"

"I don't know its name." He thrust his head out the door and called to the driver, "What is that stream we follow?"

"The Meuse," was the answer. "The other bank that you see from here is the Austrian Netherlands. We'll come to the ferry-crossing in about five minutes more."

As he closed the door and sat back beside her again, Philippine, forgetting all caution, threw her arms ecstatically about him and pressed her cheek to his, unshaven as he was. "We're saved. We're free. We

live again. Ah, my beloved, *c'est fin*! It's over." She was almost giddy with the easing of the long strain. "Why we could almost jump from the carriage at this very minute, if we wanted to, plunge in, and gain the other bank."

"No need," he said with a grin, "to wet and chill yourself. Within five minutes we'll be over it dry-shod. We cannot fail this late! How can we?"

She pressed her hand to the secreted diamond. "And I might lose our entire worldly wealth," she said with an elfin smile.

"When we're challenged this last time," he cautioned, "we'll have to change our tune, of course. Instead of going towards this fictitious Grandpierre, we're coming away from it, for non-existent though it is, it would have to lie behind us now. Or why not omit it altogether? It's served its purpose, there is no further need of it. I could say I'm a Netherlander of French Huguenot descent returning to my adopted homeland from Paris. There are many such living in exile, due to their religious beliefs, since the time of the Fourteenth King Louis."

"No," she insisted light-heartedly, "it's served us too well, that little mythical town, it's brought us good fortune, it's worked like a charm. I won't abandon it now, I'll mention its name once again for this last time, to make sure the magic spell holds."

"Sh! we draw up."

In the crystal-clear morning light, first flushing now with pink, two sentry boxes stood revealed on either side of the road, that ended abruptly at the river's bank, in a flat landing stage for the ferry.

One frontier guard came forward as Crandall alighted, musket at the ready. The other stood looking on from the background. "Where do you come from?"

"Grandpierre." He turned and helped Philippine down from the carriage.

"Where are you bound?"

"Brussels."

"On what errand?"

"We live there."

"What were you doing in France?"

"My mother has been gravely ill at Grandpierre," said Philippine. "We were called to her side. Now the danger is past, so we return home."

Crandall presented their oft-shown papers. One of the wearied horses neighed in the stillness that fell.

"In order," said the man abruptly, lifting his head. "Pass on." He handed them back, then helpfully raised his musket and beckoned to

the distant ferryman to come over and get them. The barge was moored across on the Austrian side, where it had retired the night before with its last outgoing passengers. There was not much traffic *into* France these days.

The wooden-shoed ferryman waved back in answer—they could make him out plainly for the distance was not great—and began to pole his flat-bottomed craft out from the shore. It came on slowly, seeming scarcely to move at all, but little by little it swam towards them.

They stood there alone, side by side on the landing, eyes straining towards it. The carriage had turned around and gone back by now, of course. Meanwhile they were changing the guard behind them. A detachment of two, under a sergeant, came up the road from the barracks somewhere nearby to take over duty. The four faced one another, presented arms, changed places.

The ferry was past midstream now.

One of the newly relieved men, not the one who had halted them, the other, sauntered idly over, out upon the landing-stage beside them, to chat while he saw them off.

"I think we'll have rain today."

Crandall welcomed the overture; it took the awkwardness out of waiting with their backs stiffly turned. He scanned the sky. "I doubt it. It's just the morning mist clearing the ground."

"Did I hear you speak of Grandpierre to my comrade?" the soldier went on. "On what street there does the citizeness' mother dwell?"

There was a momentary pause for they could not very well answer not even knowing there had been such a place until now. Then Philippine, unfrightened, smiled fleetingly at Crandall, at what she took to be no more than undue but not ill-meant prying. With unconscious gesture she touched her bodice again. "Why, on the Place d'Armes, the central square," she answered suavely. At the same instant the ferry's snub-nosed prow scuffed the French bank with a scraping sound and came to rest.

Suddenly, almost quicker than the eye could follow, the man's musket was out-thrust and digging into Crandall's stomach. "One move and I'll blow you open! *Ici, soldats! On les a!* Here are our birds from Paris we were told to keep an eye out for!"

"Philippine!" shouted Crandall, trying to push her away from him. "Board the boat, save yourself! There's still time!"

The others were coming up at a run, muskets levelled. He would, she realized, have seized the cocked weapon and held it against himself,

disembowelling himself if he had to, had he seen her jump to his bidding.

Instead, she drew in closer, twined her arm around his, stood staunchly beside him. "I won't leave you. If we die, then we'll die together. I don't want to live on alone."

"Why do you think we're not from Grandpierre?" Crandall asked their captor.

"Because *I* am from Grandpierre, it is my birthplace, I was never out of it until six months ago. *There is no Place d'Armes there*, no central square. Only a single road that runs straight through. Out of all the length and breadth of France you picked for your lie the one miserable village I know for certain anything about!"

Crandall drew a shuddering breath, and she saw his head droop slowly down, as if to say, "This is the end of all our hopes and plans. This is the end of the world for us."

From long-sustained force of habit, almost without meaning now, her hand went to her bosom, where the diamond nestled. The diamond that was to have been her dowry to him, their fortune, that was to have given them security, a fresh start in a new land. But what good would it be on the guillotine platform, when the knife was flashing down and your future was only five seconds long?

Suddenly it was out and in her cupped palm, sending out rays like a little detached chunk of the sun.

She lifted her arm high over her head and flung it from her with all might and main. It went arching out over the water, and then it dropped in with a little *plop* and a tiny splash, and sank from sight and was gone.

Hands clasped disconsolately together, they started walking side by side along the long road back. The road back to Paris. The road back to death.

After the first moment or two, though, she was no longer afraid. She thought of Villeneuf's words, spoken to her in prison. "I sometimes think that the finest thing there is in life—is death."

We will always be young, now, she said to herself. We will always be in love, now. Forever and forever. . . .

The trail of a long-suppressed book led to murder, and something worse than murder. And Simon Ark, searching for Satan, found evidence of his presence where it was least to be suspected . . .

EDWARD D. HOCH

THE VICAR OF HELL

CONSIDERING the fact that Sir Francis Bryan was, during his lifetime, one of the most notorious men in the British Isles, it is unusual that he should have become one of the forgotten men of history, overlooked by virtually every modern encyclopedia and text book.

Since my business is publishing, it was this fact, more than any other,

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that took me to England that winter on a strange quest. And before my long search was ended I was to find my very life threatened by a murder that took place over four hundred years ago . . .

The first thing I heard, as I left the big four-motored plane at London airport, was a small portable radio playing one of Gershwin's old tunes, "A Foggy Day." It was indeed a foggy day in London town, and for a time there'd been some doubt about our ability to land the plane. They told me such fog was common in London during the winter months, and I guess that was supposed to settle any complaints I might have voiced.

Actually, it had just turned December by the calendar; but in a city like London, where the annual mean temperature was only around 51 degrees, anything past the middle of November could be considered winter.

Had I been planning a sight-seeing visit to the tightly sprawling city on the Thames, I'm sure I'd have picked a better month than December. But this was a business trip; and though the whole thing had been my idea in the first place, I hadn't much choice over the time of the year.

And so there I was, in London in the middle of a mild fog, bound for a meeting with a girl bearing the unusual name of Rain Richards.

I'd first seen the name at the bottom of a letter sent to our London office, and forwarded to me in New York. Since I was a married man approaching the age of forty, I had not even considered the fact that Miss Rain Richards might be young and beautiful and intelligent. But she was all three of these—and much more besides—as I realized the moment she'd opened the thick-oak door of her house in the London suburbs.

She was tall and slim, with the stature of a fashion model, and yet there was something about her that hinted at a darkness beneath the surface. "I've been expecting you," she said after I'd introduced myself. "Please come in."

She led me down a narrow, dusky hall into a large room that might have been a study. Three walls were hung with a variety of small arms—guns, revolvers and automatics of all types. I judged there to be close to a hundred of them in the collection.

"Yours?" I motioned towards the walls, never dreaming that they were.

"Yes," she surprised me by saying. "Shooting is a hobby with me."

"Interesting. Now, about this matter, Miss Richards. . . ."

"You can call me Rain."

"That really is your name? I could hardly believe it when I saw the letter."

"I was born in India during the monsoon," she said, by way of explanation. "I guess my folks had a sense of humour or something."

From the looks of her, I would have guessed her age to be about twenty-seven, but it was hard to tell. I might have been five years off in either direction. She lit a cigarette as she talked, and casually blew smoke out her nostrils. "But you don't want to hear about me, of course. You've come about my letter."

"That's correct. You were quite right in saying that we'd be interested in this book you mention. Suppose you tell me a little more about it."

She relaxed deep into the chair and began to talk, with a soft toneless voice that flowed through the room like a glistening stream.

"You've heard of Sir Francis Bryan? Good! Very few people have, you know. I myself first became interested in Bryan while I was at your Columbia University. One day I came across a line in Milton which refers to him as the 'Vicar of Hell,' and that started me searching. It was a hard, long job, because most modern historians seem to have completely forgotten Bryan. But I finally found a few facts."

She paused long enough to take another draw on her cigarette, and then continued. "Bryan lived during the first half of the sixteenth century, and he was a friend and adviser to Henry VIII. He was also a cousin of the ill-fated Anne Boleyn, and when she was put on trial, which resulted in her execution death in 1536, he deserted her in order to remain in Henry's good graces. This deed caused Thomas Cromwell to refer to him in a letter as 'the Vicar of Hell,' a name that stuck with him until his death—though some historians credit Henry with first calling him that."

"But what about this unsolved murder you mentioned in your letter?" I asked her.

"Oh yes. Well, in 1548, James Butler—an Irishman and the Ninth Earl of Ormonde—was poisoned while visiting here in London. Because they feared that his widow might marry an enemy of the crown, and thus strengthen his land-holdings, certain highly placed persons persuaded Francis Bryan, himself a widower, to woo and marry her—for the good of the country. Bryan succeeded in this last duty for his country, and he moved to Ireland to take over his new lands. However, he lived only two years, and died mysteriously in 1550."

"So you have two mysterious deaths on your hands—James Butler and Bryan himself."

"Yes," she continued, in an earnest voice that he was beginning to like. "Now my researches have turned up further information, unknown

thus far to any of the historians. Sometime during the seventeenth century, about a hundred years after these deaths, there was published a large volume which claimed to give a somewhat shocking solution to these deaths. The book was immediately suppressed by the government, and all copies were seized and destroyed."

"Then what makes you think you can turn up a copy, three hundred years later?"

She rose from the chair and began striding back and forth across the room, her long legs moving quickly beneath the tight folds of her skirt. "Two weeks ago I received a letter from a man who'd heard of my quest. He offered to obtain a copy of the suppressed book for ten thousand pounds."

I relaxed and felt for my own American cigarettes. "So that's why you contacted a book publisher. You expect us to put up . . . What? Around $30,000? Put up around $30,000 for a book that might not even exist!"

"No; I simply want you to go with me to see this man. He refused even to see me unless I brought someone along who could offer that kind of money. Actually, ten thousand pounds isn't very much for a book that may have been written by another Boswell."

I sighed, and puffed on the cigarette. "I suppose not," I admitted. "At least it's worth talking to this fellow." Actually since I'd crossed the ocean on this mission already, I had no intention of going back empty-handed. But there was no reason for letting Rain Richards know that—at least not yet.

"Good," she said; "let me call him."

She placed a call to a number in the Kensington Gardens section of London, "At least that's where he told me he was located," and waited until a man's voice answered. "Hello? Mister Hugo Carrier? This is Rain Richards. I have an interested party over from the States. Can we get together sometime tonight? Oh . . . well, how about first thing in the morning? Fine . . . Let me jot down the address . . . Good, we'll see you around ten in the morning."

She hung up and turned back to me. "He can't see us until ten in the morning; will that be all right with you?"

"Guess it'll have to be. I'll stop by here for you around nine-thirty."

"Fine," she replied, the hint of a smile lingering on her face. "Till then . . ."

I left her in the doorway and walked back towards my hotel. With the coming of night, the fog seemed even thicker, but I found Waterloo

Bridge after nearly an hour of walking and hailed a cab for the remaining distance.

Back in my hotel room, I found myself pre-occupied with the memory of the girl named Rain. I took out a book and started to read, but it didn't help. I found myself comparing her with my wife, Shelly, and presently I took out my wallet and gazed at the photo of Shelly—the one I'd taken at the beach some three years ago.

Finally, unable to settle the troubled thoughts of my own mind, I climbed into bed and dropped off into a sound sleep. . . .

The morning dawned, bright and sunny, with only a slight mist to remind me of the fog of the night before. It was almost like a morning in New York, when the canyons of Manhattan seem like valleys for the flowering river of mist.

Now that I realized just how far Rain lived from the centre of London, I took a cab the entire distance. She met me at the door, looking as young and cool as I remembered her. "Come in," she greeted me. "I'm just doing a little shooting downstairs. You may watch, if you like."

I followed her to the basement, where I found a sandbagged area, with targets on the far wall, that apparently served as her shooting gallery. On a shelf in front of her were a number of hand guns, and I recognized a U.S. Army .45 and .25 pocket automatic, and several foreign pistols.

"This is my favourite," she said, choosing a tiny weapon from the shelf. "A .41 calibre Derringer. Watch!"

She brought the gun up to eye level with a single sweeping motion that my eye could hardly follow. There was a deafening roar as both of its twin barrels spouted flame, and I could see the bull's eye of one of the targets fly away at the bullets' impact.

"You're quite a shot."

"I had to be. I was in Burma when the Japanese invaded; they killed my folks."

"I'm sorry . . ."

"I'm over it now," she said. "I'm back in jolly old England, where everybody's respectable; and the war seems a long way back. I suppose I'm lucky that my family had money back here, so I can devote myself to foolish projects like searching for lost manuscripts, and such."

As she spoke, she traded the Derringer for a tiny Colt .25 automatic and let go with five quick shots at another target. We walked over to examine it together. Four of the bullets had circled the bull's eye; the fifth was off to one side.

"That should have been in the centre," she complained. "Well, what say we go to see Mister Carrier? It's nearly ten now."

I agreed and she put away the guns. "Have to clean them later—that's one part of it I don't like. Here, I'll take the Derringer with me; never can tell when it'll come in handy."

She dropped it into her purse and I raised my eyebrows lightly. "Do you have a permit for that?"

"The bobbies don't carry guns around here. Somebody has to have one, or there's no telling what would happen."

I shrugged and followed her out. The trip to Hugo Carrier's tiny flat on the other side of London was made in a swift little MG with Rain at the wheel. It was my first ride in one of them, but it seemed to handle well under her command.

Presently we came to a halt before a run-down block of apartments off Bayswater Road. "This is the address he gave me; he's on the second floor."

We climbed the shadowy stairs to the first landing, and in the dim light of a single naked bulb read the names on the doors. "Here it is," I said. "Hugo Carrier."

I knocked at the door and waited, but no one came. I knocked again.

"It's only five minutes after ten," Rain said. "He must be here."

"Maybe he's still asleep." I tried the knob of the door, more as a reflex action than for any other reason. It swung open at my touch, and in that instant I already knew what we would find inside.

But I was unprepared for the horror that met our eyes. For there, pinned to the opposite wall of the room, was the body of a man. His arms were spread in a cross, and the hands pinned to the wall with long arrows through each palm. A third arrow protruded from the man's chest.

Behind me, Rain Richards screamed. . . .

The room seemed filled with the quiet men from Scotland Yard, popping their flashbulbs and dusting for fingerprints. We told our story for the tenth time to the inspector, who seemed to be in charge.

"You hadn't previously met this man, Miss Richards?" he wanted to know.

"No." She shook her head. "I'd only talked to him on the phone."

"And have you any knowledge of this mark on the floor?" He was pointing to something that Rain and I had missed in the first shock of our discovery. It was a sort of pentagram, in a circle, drawn in red on the floor in front of Carrier's body. There was no doubt that the design had been drawn with the dead man's blood. . . .

They took us down to the yards for further questioning, but they seemed to be getting nowhere. Presently we were introduced to still another questioner, an Inspector Ashly.

As soon as I heard the name, something clicked in my mind, like the tumblers of a safe. "Ashly! Inspector Ashly!" I exclaimed. "Simon Ark told me about you once."

Ashly's face became alert at the mention of that name. "You know Simon Ark?"

"Very well; I met him years ago, back in the States. He told me of the odd happening at Devonshire a few years back."

Ashly was interested now. "I sometimes thought it was all a bad dream; I doubted, somehow, that the man ever really existed. It's certainly a relief to talk to someone else who knows him."

Ashly was a short man with a deep, booming voice, and I well remembered Simon Ark's tale of their adventures together in the snows of Devonshire. He was much as Simon had described him, and in that moment I knew that the odd murder of Hugo Carrier was another case that called for Simon's special talents.

"But did you know that Simon Ark was in England?" I asked him.

"No! Where is he?"

"I have no idea, but he left New York over a month ago. If we could find him, I'm sure he could help us on this case."

Inspector Ashly frowned. "He's not a detective, though. And there hardly seem to be any supernatural elements in this case . . ."

"I wouldn't be too sure," I replied. "You've probably heard that a pentagram was drawn in blood on the floor of the room. Isn't that an old symbol of witchcraft and satanism?"

Ashly struck the table with his fist. "I believe you're right. And if so, we can build up a newspaper story that's sure to attract Simon Ark if he's anywhere around."

After that, we left the buildings of New Scotland Yard, and walked through the chill December air towards Westminster Abbey. Whitehall was buzzing with midday activity, and before we'd gone two blocks there was already a newsboy shouting about the "weird murder in Kensington."

We walked on, aimlessly, until at last Rain asked, "Who is this Simon Ark you both seemed to know, anyway? Is he a detective?"

"No," I replied, searching for the right words to explain the fantastic story. "He's perhaps the wisest man in the world, a man with a past that may date back to the beginning of the Christian era. He's been

searching the world for a long time, perhaps for centuries, in hopes of meeting the devil in combat."

"But . . . Are you trying to kid me? Is he some sort of crazy man, or what?"

A double-decked bus rumbled by us and we turned west on Victoria Street. Behind us, Big Ben was just tolling the hour of one o'clock.

"Whatever he is, he's not crazy," I told her. "Actually, the Comte de Saint-Germain claimed to have lived for four thousand years, and it's possible that he did. And the German physician, Paracelsus, is once supposed to have fought bodily with Satan. Certainly Simon Ark's story is no more fantastic than theirs."

"But who is he? Where did he come from?"

"That's something nobody knows. My own guess is that he was once a Coptic priest, back in the early centuries after Christ; but he never says much about it. He told me once, though, that he knew Saint Augustine, personally—which would make him well over 1500 years old."

Rain laughed at that and gripped my arm with hers. "I was beginning to think you were serious, but you're just having some fun with me."

"Believe me, I *am* serious."

"Well, then you'll have to show me this man and let me judge for myself. I saw many unusual things in India, but never a man who claimed to be over 1500 years old."

A breeze somewhat cooler than the rest hit us then, and she pushed closer to me. "Let's get inside somewhere, out of this confounded cold air."

"What we should be doing is trying to find that book Carrier had for us," I told her. "If the book was the cause of his murder, it must be certainly worth having."

She was excited now, with the hint of intrigue in the air. "You mean that you really think there might be a connection between the book and his murder?"

"It's certainly possible; we should have searched the place for it."

"Oh, the police would have found it if it were there," she replied. "It's a folio, you know. Hardly the thing you hide behind a picture or anything."

"It does seem odd, though, that if all the copies were destroyed three hundred years ago, Carrier should come up with one now. Maybe the whole thing was a swindle of some sort."

"I doubt that," she said. "He seemed only interested in receiving payment for the book."

We'd reached Victoria Station by this time, and we decided to hail a cab for the long trip back to Rain's place, rather than return for the MG. Even the taxi trip across London was slow at this time of day, and it was nearly two when we reached her house.

"Let me bring in the mail," she said. "Not that there's ever . . ." She paused and ripped open an envelope that had been addressed in a quick, almost illegible scrawl.

"Look!" she exclaimed, "It's from Carrier."

"What? Let me see that!" I took it away from her shaking hands and read: "*I may not be alive tomorrow when you come. If they get me first, I will at least have cheated them of their secret. The book you seek is titled 'The Worship Of Satan,' and together with accounts of divers crimes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it also includes the forbidden rituals of devil worship. The only copy still in existence in London is in an ancient dwelling at* 65 *Crashaw Place, behind the* Blue Pig Pub. *You will find a room there which was once a priest's hole, during the Elizabethan persecution of the Catholics. The book is in this room, though to insure payment of the agreed sum, I cannot tell you more as to its location. I sincerely hope that my fears will prove groundless. Hugo Carrier.*"

She had been reading it over my shoulder, and she said, "What's all this about devil worship? What has that got to do with Sir Francis Bryan?"

"I don't know, Rain; I don't know. I just hope that we succeed in contacting Simon Ark."

"Maybe you were right about this all being some sort of gigantic swindle."

I frowned and shook my head. "He sounds like an educated man, which doesn't mean he might not have been planning a swindle—but the fact of his murder seems to bear out his honesty. In fact, he's one of those men I sort of wish I'd met during his life."

She lit a cigarette and dropped the letter on a table. "Are you sorta glad you met me?"

I raised my eyebrows to look at her, but she'd already gone into the kitchen in search of drinks for us. I ignored the question and said, "We should probably go to this place he mentions and look around. We might be able to turn up the book."

She returned with two tall frosted glasses. "I'm beginning to think it's not worth all the trouble. After all, we might end up with arrows in us, too."

"It's certainly a weird business," I agreed as I sipped my drink. "Say, these are pretty good. What's in them?"

"A secret love potion," she murmured with a grin; "let's have a little music."

"I'm a married man, you know," I told her, trying unsuccessfully to keep it sounding light.

She came to me then, with the radio behind her playing something soft by Mantovani, and the clatter of passing traffic drifting in from the street. And it was as I'd feared it would be since I first met her.

I tried to think about Shelly, and our little house in Westchester; but gradually the memories faded from my brain, and I was just a man of flesh and desire. . . .

Later, too long later, as night drifted slowly in from the east, we left the house and started out for the address in Crashaw Place. In the night's already deepening shadows, an occasional bird glided down from above, and it might have been a bat or a gull. I only knew it was a moving, living creature up there in the dark, and maybe I wished I was up there too.

"It's not too far," Rain told me, in a voice that made even a casual remark into a hint of intimacy. "We can follow the river all the way."

The Thames was winding on its never-ending journey to the sea, and as we followed along its banks, the whole of London seemed to sleep, even at this early hour. It was as if we were alone in the city, alone without the cluster of crowds and the rumble of civilization.

I paused a moment to light a cigarette, and it was then I saw two men moving in on us. "Rain!" I shouted. "Look out!"

She whirled quickly and a blow from the first man's blackjack caught her on the shoulder. I hurled myself at him, and we went down in a heap. I tried to see where our second attacker was, but the first one was keeping me busy.

Finally I broke free and grabbed up Rain's hand. "Come on," I managed to shout, dragging her with me down a flight of stone steps that led to the water's edge.

I could feel them behind us as we hurtled down the stairs, and at the bottom step I felt strong fingers of steel tear at my throat. I lost my grip on Rain and went tumbling backward, the hulking attacker on top of me. I struggled to free myself from those murderous fingers, but already I saw one hand leave my throat and come up with a glistening knife.

"Die, damn you," the raspy voice squeaked, and in that instant I thought I had reached the end of everything. But suddenly a roar split the air and his face seemed to fly apart before me. His dying grip

relaxed on my neck, and I saw the little smoking Derringer in Rain's steady hand.

"I didn't want to kill him," she sobbed; "but there was no time for a good shot."

"Don't worry. Where's the other one now?"

"Up there!" She pointed to the top of the steps, where the second assassin stood outlined against the dark sky.

"Duck! He's got a gun!" I pulled her down just as the man fired.

"It's a .45," she told me between gasps. "And my gun is empty."

I glanced fearfully at the dim river a few feet away. "Can you swim?"

"A little, but we'd never make it to the water."

"We'll have to try. Come on." He saw us the instant we made our move, and I saw his gun hand move around for a second shot at us.

Then suddenly he seemed to falter, and for the first time I saw the dim figure in the darkness behind him. The .45 slipped from his hand and clattered to the concrete below; then he followed it, diving over in a graceful arc that thudded his body against the very edge of the bank and then hurled it into the black river.

We stood rooted to the spot, looking up at the dim figure who moved down the steps towards us. And then I recognized the tall, heavy-set features of Simon Ark. . . .

"Simon! You certainly arrived just in time. How did you ever find us?"

He smiled slightly, as he always did, and replied, "There are ways. I see you already disposed of one of them."

We looked down at the bloody face of the man Rain's bullets had killed. "Luckily for me," I said. "This is Rain Richards, a most unusual girl, and a crack shot with a pistol."

Simon Ark grunted a greeting and bent to examine the body. "Do you think this is connected in any way with the death of Hugo Carrier last night?" he asked us.

"I don't know," I replied, "but Rain received a letter from Carrier this noon. He told us of a pub where something was hidden, and we were on our way there now."

"Hidden," he repeated, suddenly interested. "What is it you seek?"

"A book," I told him. "A book called *The Worship of Satan*, written during the seventeenth century, but banned by the government, which destroyed all copies. The book supposedly gives the solution to the 1548 murder of Sir James Butler and the mysterious death two years later of Sir Francis Bryan."

"Sir Francis Bryan," Simon Ark muttered. "The Vicar of Hell. . . ."

"You've heard of him," Rain said, sounding surprised.

"I've heard of him. . . ."

Simon Ark was the same as when I'd last seen him, back in the States a few months earlier. He still had the mysterious quality about him that sometimes made you wonder at the things he said. In that moment, I felt certain he'd known Francis Bryan personally, somehow, in the dark past.

"Your old friend Inspector Ashly is working on the case," I told him.

"I saw his name in the papers; he's a brilliant man. I'll call him now and tell him what happened here. Then we can be on our way to this pub you mentioned."

"You're coming with us?" Rain asked.

"Certainly. *The Worship of Satan* is a most unusual book. If there is a copy still remaining, I would like to see it."

We had climbed the steps from the river now, and in the distance I could see a police car, apparently called by some alert neighbour, bearing down upon us.

"Simon, do you really think this devil worship business is tied in with Carrier's murder?"

He gazed out across the river, as if looking at something far away which only he could see, and then he answered. "In the year 1100, King William the Second was slain by an arrow in the New Forest. His death was part of a human sacrifice of a cult of devil worshippers. Today they still worship, and kill, in much the same way."

His words sent a chill through me, and I put my arm around Rain's slim shoulders. Then the police joined us, and Simon spoke quickly to them, in that old manner of his which could somehow convince anyone of anything. He wrote a brief message to Chief Inspector Ashly and then we departed.

"I believe this pub should be our first stop," he said. "Do you know the way?"

Rain nodded and led us down a dark alley, away from the river. "I feel better now with you two strong men to protect me," she said.

"I doubt if they'll bother us further," Simon Ark comforted her. "They must have learned from Hugo Carrier that he'd sent you the letter."

A slight mist was beginning to gather in the streets, and I suspected we were in for more fog. "Doesn't the fog ever lift around here?" I mumbled.

"This is the season for it," Simon Ark said. "London has been

foggy in December for as long as I can remember. The autumn is the worst time for it."

Presently, we reached Crashaw Place and ahead of us we could make out the weather-beaten sign of the Blue Pig, "By Appointment To His Majesty King George V." It was a run-down place that might have looked better thirty years earlier, under George's reign. Now it was badly in need of a paint job, and I couldn't help thinking that a bit of good old American neon would have pepped up the swaying sign.

Inside, a few obviously regular customers lined the bar, and turned as we entered, in mild expectation of seeing some of their nightly drinking companions. Rain was the only girl in the place, but none of them seemed to mind. We ordered three beers because that seemed to be the thing everyone was drinking, and carried them to a table.

Presently, when Simon Ark was certain he'd identified a stout, balding gentleman as the owner, he rose and walked over to him. "Pardon me, sir, but I'm a visitor in your country. . . ."

"Oh," the stout man said. "Well, we're always happy to entertain foreigners at the Blue Pig, sir. My name is George Kerrigan. I'm the owner of this here place."

"Very pleased to meet you, Mr. Kerrigan. I'm Simon Ark, and these are my friends. We've been told that the rear of this building dates back to the seventeenth century, and we're very anxious to examine it further."

"Glad to be of service," Kerrigan smiled at us. "Yes, sir, this here's one of the just about only old buildings like it still standing. You know, there was that God-awful fire back in 1666, and it just about burned down the whole damned town." He spoke as if he'd witnessed it personally, with just the right degree of awe.

"We understand," Simon Ark continued, "that you even have a room where Catholic priests hid during the persecutions."

"That we have, sir—or at least them's the stories what goes with the old place. Come on back this way and I'll show you."

We followed him down a musty corridor which led into the rear of the pub. Here, in a house that was obviously much older than the front, he paused to unlock a door and throw it open before us. "Haven't been in here myself in a good many months," he told us. "Wait a minute while I get some candles."

"No electricity?" Rain asked, somewhat startled.

"Not in this room, miss; we never use it, so we never bothered to wire it."

He returned in a moment with a multi-branched candlestick held high, and led us into the room. It was no more, really, than an enclosed space some twenty feet square, without windows, and with only the one door through which we'd entered. An ancient, musty smell hung over the place, suggesting that even the air we were now breathing might have been several hundred years old. The walls were covered with a fantastic blaze of coloured wallpaper, which even now was just beginning to fade. The only bit of furniture in the room was a huge old carved table, some ten feet long, which stood against the opposite wall. Its top had been covered with newspapers, apparently to preserve the finish.

Kerrigan was busy telling us the history of the room, from its priest-hole days through the reigns of various kings and queens, but I noticed that Simon Ark was far more concerned with the ancient table. He brushed aside the dusty newspapers, which I noticed were some four weeks old, and smiled slightly when he came upon a shallow drawer in the table's side. But the smile faded when he found the drawer empty.

I, meanwhile, had strolled over to one of the walls and was trying to decipher some patterns from the faded rainbows of colour. But the paper seemed to be designed without any purpose, a weird reminder of seventeenth-century England.

Simon Ark was on his knees, examining the bottom of the long table now; but if Kerrigan thought this odd, he made no comment. He had trapped Rain in a corner and was continuing his brief history of England. "You know, miss, George III himself once visited this very pub, near the end of his reign. Of course there are those who say he was crazy at the time, but he was certainly a friendly one. My great-grandfather used to tell me about those days when I was very small. . . ."

"Pardon me," Simon Ark interrupted, resuming an upright position. "But if this room was once a hiding place for priests, I'm sure it has more than one exit. Suppose you show us the secret way out."

Kerrigan never blinked an eye, but simply led us to one of the room's corners as if he'd intended to show it to us all along. "Here it is," he said, and gave a yank to an almost-invisible metal ring set flush with the floor. A well-oiled trap-door rose out of the floor and we peered down into the darkness below.

"It simply leads to the cellar," Kerrigan explained. "I don't even store anything down there any more. Too many rats." He lowered the candles a bit so we could see that the cellar was truly empty.

'Well, thank you very much for the tour," Simon told him. "I think that's about all we wanted to see."

He relocked the room behind us and led the way back to the pub's main room. "Have a beer on me before you go," he told us. "And stop by again some time."

"Thanks," Rain replied. "We will."

Soon afterward, we departed and headed back through the gathering fog to Rain's house. When we were a safe distance away from the Blue Pig, I asked Simon, "What do you think about it? Any idea where the book might be hidden?"

"I have ideas about many things," he told us; "I even have ideas about the odd-looking stains on that table-top."

"Stains?" I wondered. "I didn't notice any."

Simon Ark grunted. "In any event, we have much more here than simply the mystery of the Vicar of Hell. Although certainly the death of Carrier suggests that the missing book is involved."

By the time we reached Rain's place, the fog had closed in completely, and visibility was down to some fifty yards. We followed her in, on her invitation to make some coffee, and settled down around the fireplace.

I tossed a couple of logs on, and before long the room was alive with the glow of leaping flames. Simon Ark settled back in his chair, closed his eyes, and began to talk.

"Although most history books merely imply that the one-eyed Sir Francis Bryan earned the title of 'Vicar of Hell' by deserting his cousin, Anne Boleyn, when she needed him most, it seems probably there were further reasons. And in a period when witch cults and black magic were running wild throughout England, perhaps it is not too fantastic to suspect that Bryan himself was involved in one of these cults. Certainly that, more than anything else, would have earned him the odd title."

Rain arrived with the steaming coffee and passed it to us. "But what about the murder of James Butler in 1848? And Bryan's own mysterious death two years later?"

"There are two possible solutions which immediately present themselves. Bryan himself could have poisoned James Butler in order to marry his wife, Joan. Then, when Joan discovered this, she herself killed her husband's murderer."

Rain sipped her coffee and lit a cigarette. "And I suppose you'll say the other possibility is that Joan killed both of her husbands."

Simon Ark smiled and nodded. "I admit that was my thought."

And then, half to himself, he added, "I only regret that I never had the honour of meeting the Vicar of Hell. . . ."

Rain shot me a glance at that, but I was used to such remarks from Simon's lips. I ignored it and asked instead, "Do you really think this book, *The Worship Of Satan*, has something in it about Bryan?"

"Very possible, or else there would have been no reason for the government to ban it at the time; books on devil worship and the like were quite common. From the size of it, I would say it must also have included several large illustrations."

We talked further on the subject, but presently, as midnight drew near, Simon Ark departed, promising to call us in the morning. "It might be a good idea to get some sleep," he cautioned me. "Tomorrow might be a long day."

"Why?"

"Because there will be a full moon tomorrow night," he said, and then he was gone, into the fog.

I came back into Rain's living-room, puzzling over these words. I looked at a calendar and saw that there would indeed be a full moon on the following night. "What do you suppose he meant by that?" Rain asked me.

"I don't know. But let's forget about all that for now." I walked over and sat next to her on the couch.

"Should we forget about your wife back in New York, too?"

I didn't answer her.

Instead, my hand went out and found hers, and I drew her close to me in the flickering light from the fireplace. . . .

Simon Ark was at my hotel-room before noon on the following morning, and I was surprised to see that Inspector Ashly was with him. "Good morning," I greeted them. "What's up?"

"Everything, from what Simon's been telling me," Ashly said. "You fellows must have had a pretty busy night, shooting up would-be killers and such."

"We're lucky we're even alive," I said; "Simon arrived just in time last night."

"He told me. He also had me check on the two dead men, and I find they both frequented the Blue Pig pub."

"That figures," I said, lighting a before-breakfast cigarette. "There's something funny about that place."

Simon Ark chuckled. "The understatement of the year, certainly. If you had been a little more observant, I'm sure you would have come

to the same conclusions that I did about the Blue Pig, and its mysterious back room."

"And just what are your conclusions?" I asked, aware that he'd already outlined his ideas to Inspector Ashly.

"I'm convinced that a Black Mass, and various other ceremonies of Satanism, are being carried on at the Blue Pig, in that very room. And I'm further convinced that there's another meeting of the group being held this evening."

"I'll admit that I suspected something funny, but I think now you're going a little overboard, aren't you, Simon?"

"He's got me convinced," Ashly boomed out in that deep voice which still amazed me. "Wait until you've heard the whole thing."

I settled back and sighed. "O.K., Simon. Go ahead and convince me."

"Well," he began, "the arrow murder of Hugo Carrier hinted at some sort of ritual crime; and, as I already told you, this type of slaying has been used before by devil worshippers. The attack on you and Rain proved that Carrier's murder was caused by his knowledge of the book, *The Worship Of Satan.* The people who killed him did so because they feared he would reveal the location of the book. Therefore the book itself, or its location, or both, are dangerous to them."

"All right so far," I admitted. "But why does that make it the Blue Pig?"

"First, the men who attacked you were from the Blue Pig. Second, Carrier gave that as the location of the book. Third, George Kerrigan lied to us when we visited him last night."

"Lied? About what?"

"He said he never stored things in the cellar, yet the secret trap-door was well oiled. And he said he hadn't been in the room in months, yet the newspapers covering the table were four weeks old."

"So I'll agree he lied. But why does it have to be devil worship? Maybe he just runs a card game in that room."

Simon Ark closed his eyes once more. "Those were bloodstains on the table-top," he said very quietly. "It was used as an altar, for animal —or perhaps human sacrifices. . . ."

The three of us were silent for a moment. It was hard for me to believe that such a thing could happen in twentieth-century London. And yet I knew, from past experiences with Simon Ark, that there were things happening every day beyond human knowledge. It was sometimes as if a vast alternate world of evil were operating all the time, giving us an occasional glimpse into its horrible scenes.

"But why?" I asked. "Why, of all places, should they choose an ancient pub like the Blue Pig?"

"Because it was once a hiding place for priests, a place where actual Mass was celebrated, the next best thing to a church. And because it later became the resting place of the only existing copy of *The Worship Of Satan.*"

"Horrible. . . ." Inspector Ashly muttered. "Now tell us how you're so certain they'll meet again tonight."

"Many strange things happen when the moon is full. Cults of devil worshippers do not necessarily, or always, meet at the time of the full moon: but when I noticed that the newspapers covering the table were just four weeks old—dated on the first day of last month's full moon—I guessed this was the time of their previous meeting. Thus, since there is another full moon beginning tonight, I believe we'll find them there again."

Ashly rose to his feet. "My men will be ready to close in whenever you give the word, Simon. I know from the last time we met that your theories are usually correct."

I lit another cigarette and began to think about the breakfast I was missing. "Since when is it against the law to carry on religious rites in a private dwelling?" I asked.

Ashly bristled slightly at my question. "This isn't a religion; and you seem to have forgotten the poor devil they left pinned to the wall with three arrows in him."

"I guess I did for a moment," I admitted, feeling slightly subdued. "So—what's our plan of action?"

"The Inspector and his men will surround the place, early in the evening, and await my signal to move in," Simon Ark explained. "I will be in the basement, under that trap door, and you can join me if you wish."

"I wouldn't miss it," I told him. "If you're going to find Satan himself in that room, I want to be along, too."

Ashly sighed. "I believe you two are crazy to risk discovery like that, but I know better than to try arguing with Simon here."

"It might be best," Simon said, "if you could get a gun from somewhere, though. Could you borrow one from Rain?"

"Sure could."

"Don't let me hear anything about this," Ashly muttered. "In London, even the police have a difficult time getting permission to carry guns."

"Well, you'd better have them tonight," Simon Ark told him. "These people are very close to insanity, all of them; when cornered, they might do anything."

After that, they left me, and then I was alone with my thoughts of the night to come. And my thoughts of Rain and of my own house in Westchester, and of Shelly who waited there for me. For the first time I wondered if I would ever go back to her . . .

The cab carried me through Picadilly Circus, past the neon signs now darkened in the light of day, where Gordon's Gin and Wrigley's Gum fought each other for the customer's attention. And presently I was back at Rain's place in the suburbs. "Hello, again," she greeted me at the door. "Have a good night's sleep?"

"Fine." I quickly outlined the details of Simon Ark's revelations. "How's chances of borrowing a gun till tomorrow?"

"Sure," she said, leading me to a cabinet. "Which one do you want?"

"I used a .45 in the Military Police. That's the only one I'm sure of, so I'd better take one of those."

She handed me the heavy automatic, together with an empty clip and a box of bullets. I shoved seven of them into the clip and then rammed it into the butt. "Thanks a lot, Rain. I'll have it back in the morning."

"Let me come with you," she said then. "I'll go crazy sitting home here, thinking about it."

"Sorry; that's out of the question. Ashly's even worried with Simon and I on the scene. But I'll call you as soon as it's over."

"Is that a promise?"

"That's a promise." I kissed her lightly on the lips and then went out into the street, the automatic hanging heavy in my topcoat pocket.

I took time out to cable the New York office that I expected to obtain the missing book that evening, and close the deal. Then I went to a middle-class bar in downtown London and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to think about nothing at all.

When I got back to the hotel I found an air mail letter from Shelly awaiting me. I tossed it on the bed without opening it.

I wondered, for just a second, if possibly I was going to the Blue Pig that night in some subconscious hope that death would solve my problem for me.

Because now I was convinced that I loved Rain Richards. . .

The basement of the Blue Pig Pub was a surprisingly easy place to enter, and it took Simon and me only a few moments to locate the door to the old cellar and place ourselves beneath the trap door.

I took the .45 from my pocket, and jacked a bullet into the chamber; after that we waited.

And waited. . . .

Presently, when my wrist watch glowed 11.30, and I had just about

given up hope, we heard some movement in the room above. At almost the same instant we caught the sound of people entering through the basement, as we had come.

We took shelter behind some musty packing cases, and watched several men and a few women entering the room through the trap door. Finally, when the sounds from above told us the ceremony had begun, we resumed our post beneath the door.

Simon Ark edged it up a fraction of an inch, and through the opening I saw a scene I'll never forget. There, behind the long table, stood the white-robed figure of George Kerrigan, his arms outstretched towards the ceiling. On either end of the table burned dozens of long black candles, sending their dancing flames over the kneeling figures of some twenty men and women who nearly filled the small room.

The brightly coloured wallpaper had been covered in spots by hanging pictures of basilisks and other mythical monsters, and behind Kerrigan I saw a statue of Jupiter, the ancient god.

"Like the one the pagans erected on Calvary, after Christ's death," Simon Ark whispered. "We are in the midst of evil here."

"What are we waiting for, then?" I asked; "let's go!"

"Be patient. There is still more to be seen."

The kneeling figures above were swaying back and forth now, as if under the influence of some narcotic. And a low murmuring chant was slowly building up among them.

"It's horrible," I said, half to myself.

Simon Ark let the trap door fall into place and he said, very quietly, "Perhaps, though, the evil up there is no greater than the evil in your own heart."

"What?" I muttered. "What do you mean?"

"Who is to say that the sin of adultery is any less serious than the sin of devil worship?" he asked, quietly. "Certainly they are both works of Satan."

"Are you crazy, Simon? Why pick a time like this to give me a lecture on morality?"

"It is as good a time as any, my old friend. I came here searching for the devil, and perhaps I have found him in the least likely of all places—inside of you!"

The chanting from above had grown louder, and it pounded at my eardrums as I listened to Simon's words. "No . . ." I mumbled. "No. . . ."

"Leave this woman, and go home to Shelly, before it is too late."

"I . . ."

Suddenly, the chanting above turned to shouting, and there was a rush of movement. I lifted the trap door again and saw a startling sight. "It's Rain! They've got Rain!"

Simon Ark was at my side; and he, too, saw the struggling girl in the grip of two strong men. "She must have sneaked in, and Kerrigan recognized her. The little fool!"

And I saw that the white-robed Kerrigan had already produced his deadly bow and arrow. His right hand was drawing back on the bow string and the trembling arrow was pointing through the flickering stillness at Rain's struggling body.

I waited no longer. While my left hand slammed up on the trap door, my right was already bringing the heavy .45 into firing position.

George Kerrigan half turned towards me, and the look of utter surprise was spreading over his face when my bullet tore into his shoulder.

After that, it was chaos. . . .

I came out of it with a bloody nose and a torn sleeve, thanks mostly to the prompt arrival of Inspector Ashly and his men. My bullet had completely shattered Kerrigan's shoulder, and he was unconscious by the time the ambulance arrived. His followers were quickly rounded up and led away, and soon only Simon and Ashly and Rain and I remained in the room.

"That bow and arrow should be enough to convict them of Carrier's murder," Ashly said. "I only hope the newspapers don't get a hold of this devil worship angle, or I fear they'll have you stripped nude and about to be sacrificed on the altar, Miss Richards. These reporters are great at building up a sensational story."

"I'm just happy to be alive," Rain answered. "Right now I don't care what they say about me. When I saw that arrow pointing at my chest, all I could remember was poor Carrier pinned to the wall."

"You owe your life to your friends here," Ashly told her.

"I know. Now I just wish Simon would tell us where the book is hidden so we could all go home."

"That's right, Simon," I agreed. "Where is this elusive copy of *The Worship Of Satan*?"

He sighed, and motioned around the room, now brightly lit by several portable police spotlights. "Right where it's always been, my friends; it should have been obvious to you from the beginning. After all, why was it necessary to kill Carrier to keep him from telling its location? Why didn't they simply move it to a new hiding place?"

"That's right," I agreed. "Why didn't they move it?"

"Because they couldn't; because it was the one part of this room that could not easily be disposed of or transported to another place."

We looked around at the long table, and at the pictures, and at the statue, but we saw nothing.

"Where?" Rain asked simply.

Simon Ark closed his eyes. "During the seventeenth century, when a book was banned by a government censor, it was not always burned. If the book was a large one, like a folio, the pages were damasked into wallpaper . . ."

"Wallpaper!"

"Certainly. The text was blotted out by overprinting with a heavy design in bright colours, and it was used for wallpaper. Here," he motioned around the room at the multi-coloured walls, "here is the last remaining copy of *The Worship Of Satan*, and with it is the final secret of the Vicar of Hell. . . ."

After that, much later, I walked with Rain Richards through the mist of a cold London morning. . . .

"I'll get the University laboratory to work on that wallpaper right away," she said, "but it'll still be months before the original printing is readable."

"I know," I said, "but somehow it isn't as important as it was a few days ago. Whether Bryan was a murderer himself, or whether he was merely the second victim of his murderous wife, is something that need not concern us, really. The punishment for the crimes has been meted out long ago by a much higher court than ours."

"I suppose so," she agreed reluctantly. "It's only too bad that it had to cause so much trouble and death."

We walked further in silence, and then I said, "You know, it's all over between us. . . ."

"Yes, I know. . . ."

"Simon Ark talked to me tonight, while we waited in that basement."

"He's quite a man, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he is."

"Remember me to your wife."

"Yes," I said, but we both knew that I never would.

"Good-bye. . . ."

"Good-bye, Rain. . . ."

I watched her as she walked away into the morning mist. I watched her until she was out of sight and then I went back to my hotel-room.

The air mail letter from Shelly was still on the bed; I tore it open, and settled down in a chair to read it. . . .

It always pays to remember your grammar!

proof positive

by Donald A. Yates

PROFESSOR Simon Thurman, teacher of freshman composition and allied subjects at the City College was this afternoon enjoying an unusual deviation from his academic routine. It was the first day of his summer vacation. The last blue book had been corrected, the last hastily assembled term paper had been read and assigned a grade, and the final results had been turned into the English Department's secretary. On this very warm, summery afternoon, as he strolled purposefully along a drowsing city street, he felt quite free and unencumbered. The briefcase he carried was not filled with papers to be corrected; its contents were of a much more personal and exciting nature. And, interestingly enough, on the first day of his vacation, Professor Thurman was going to jail.

Well, not *into* jail, precisely. That, however, was what he had told his wife that morning; he had reminded her that that afternoon he was going to jail, and they had enjoyed the little joke. But if the truth be told, the professor was merely making a trip to the police-precinct station.

When he finally turned off of the sweltering street at his destination, his steps brought him before the police-desk sergeant.

Sergeant Meehan glanced up at the professor's arrival with tentative good-will, but his attitude quickly degenerated into one of annoyance when he observed that the fragile-looking little man was managing to appear quite cool and comfortable in a starched dark suit, shirt, tie, and all.

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"Well?" the sergeant said.

"I should like to see your detective inspector of homicide, please," the professor stated.

"Who's that?"

"The detective inspector of——"

"Oh, Lieutenant Glover?" The sergeant's easily read mood perceptibly cracked and then sweetened a bit with the news that this was apparently a business call and not the cause for a sudden alarm. The thought of any deliberate action in the oppressive heat genuinely saddened him.

"May I ask what this is about?" said the sergeant, extending himself.

Professor Thurman hugged his briefcase to his chest and answered in a confidential tone. "Well, you see, I've been planning for some time to write a novel. It's a—er—a detective novel, you understand. It's something I've worked on for some time now. I thought that the lieutenant could help me a bit with some of the terminology and—lingo."

The sergeant nodded, manifesting a polite show of interest. "Does Lieutenant Glover know you're coming?"

"Well, yes, several days ago I wrote him about my plans and he said he was perfectly willing to——"

The balance of this explanation was not immediately discernible, for at this moment, from up the stairway leading to the sergeant's central desk there came a group of five men, two police officers and three casually dressed citizens. The latter trio was protesting in loud, indignant tones. The professor hastily retreated to a bench along the wall from which vantage point he observed with open interest as the smallest of these three, a very hot and excited fellow, suddenly eluded the grip of his captor and ran up to the desk. There was a mask of desperation over his features.

"Sarge, please listen to me! These guys don't understand. I didn't do anything!" The man looked to be in his late thirties but he had the physical energy of a younger person. He whirled around hopefully to see if his appeal to a higher authority had had any dramatic effect on his captors, and in doing so his eyes fell on Professor Thurman. A lightning flash of surprise struck his face. He seemed visibly to waver for a moment, then seemed to make a quick decision. He turned imploringly full on the professor and exclaimed, "Believe me! I don't know nothing!"

"Book 'em," said the officer who was apparently in charge of the party. "We nabbed all three of 'em together in back of Dino's Place.

Doing a little business with the numbers. We picked up a load of cards and a bundle of cash, too."

The agitated man was unrestrainable. "I'm innocent!" he cried. "Please listen to me. *I don't know nothing!*" Once again he turned to Professor Thurman, of all people, for some sort of help.

Suddenly the professor knew he had seen the fellow before.

"That's right," chimed in one of his companions. "None of us does. You boys got things all wrong."

"Sure, sure," agreed the officer with easy patience. "These two were thumbing through the cash and the little guy here we caught in the next room on the phone. Book 'em all."

Professor Thurman, forgotten for the moment, sat pensively at the fringe of the scene while the formality of registering the suspects was being carried out.

Yes, he *did* know the man from somewhere. He was sure of it. Now, *where*? That was the question. It must have been—Yes, of course! In one of his classes! He frowned at the thought of one of his students falling into disfavour with the law. Wait. Now that helped a bit—*trouble*. His orderly mind clicked back over a series of classes, school years, faces—Now he remembered! An earnest young student in a first-year composition course, a hard worker, but with a sketchy background. From a rather tough east side high school. The name he could not remember. But part of the total recall he sought was coming back to him. It must have been fifteen years ago, at least.

He doubted now that the boy had finished the course with him. He began to remember that part, too. There had been trouble—trouble in the family. Sickness or something of the sort. He had dropped out of school and had disappeared into the obscurity of the east side slums.

And here he was again, popping up to the surface. An arresting thought suddenly occurred to him. Could it be that—It *was* possible, he considered. With a certain professional pride he reflected that some things never change . . .

In a matter of minutes, the three men were led away and the professor was back at Sergeant Meehan's desk, waiting while the anguished echo of the little man's "*I don't know nothing!*" had died down along the halls.

"The short man is a bookie?" the professor asked.

"No. Why?" replied the sergeant.

"I thought I heard one of the arresting officers refer to him as——"

The sergeant chuckled. "Ha, that's pretty good. No, his nickname is Bennie the Bookworm, not Bennie the Bookie." He allowed himself to enjoy the professor's confusion.

"An odd sobriquet—eh, nickname," Professor Thurman commented.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. No, Bennie's just what you'd call a wee bit shady. We know him around here. Never into serious trouble. He just travels with the wrong kind of friends."

The professor nodded. "His nickname interests me," he persisted.

"Well, he's supposed to be pretty well educated. Spent some time in college, they say. Anyway, he's supposed to read lots of books."

"I see," said Professor Thurman. He thought for a moment. "Sergeant, will all three of those men be placed in the same—eh, cell?"

"Probably. Why do you want to know?"

By now the professor had made his decision. Without further hesitation, he replied: "Sergeant I think I'd like to speak with Lieutenant Glover immediately, if you would be so kind. I assure you this is most important."

What happened after that was genuinely astonishing. In rapid succession: Professor Thurman conferred briefly with the precinct's Lieutenant Glover, the three suspects were casually intercepted and placed in widely separated cells, Bennie the Bookworm was secretly slipped out for a conference with the lieutenant and, minutes later, was headed full speed—courtesy of the precinct—in a patrol car for St. Lawrence Hospital where he managed to arrive in time to be present in a sixth-floor ward for a wondrous event.

Back at the precinct station, in the wake of this whirlwind of events, three men stood talking beside Sergeant Meehan's desk.

"If you don't mind my asking, Lieutenant," said Meehan, "how did the professor here know that Bennie's wife was going to have a baby—their first one, at that?"

Lieutenant Glover, normally a taciturn soul, smiled. "Very clever," he said.

"It was a simple matter, Sergeant," offered Professor Thurman. "Really it was." His fundamental modesty seemed taxed at this point, however, and he did not elucidate.

Lieutenant Glover intervened. "Benny told us the whole story after we got him alone," he continued. "The numbers charge will stick, of course, against the two others. But Bennie was innocent, and they know it. But, naturally, under the circumstances Bennie wouldn't ask for special treatment. It would have looked as if he were going to welsh on the others—behind their backs. He realized this all along. All he wanted to do was to get a chance to be alone with someone

long enough to explain that he had just stopped by at Dino's to make a call home—to check on how his wife was feeling."

"And she was about due, eh?" asked the sergeant.

"Actually," Glover replied, "she had just left for the hospital with a friend. Bennie talked with a neighbour. We checked this out and it cleared him on the phone call."

"No wonder he was sweating it out when they brought him in."

"Right," said Glover. "He was clean, no doubt about that. But he had to prove it, he had to talk to someone *immediately*—without giving the impression that he was trying to squeal on his friends. A tricky situation, to say the least."

Professor Thurman, obviously pleased with his afternoon's work so far, spoke up at this point, humbly adopting the objective style of classroom presentation. "This was when I played my unanticipated role. As it happens, Bennie had once been a student of mine in a composition class. He recognized me. Now you recall that he insisted over and again, *specifically to me*—these were his exact words—'*I don't know nothing!*' This involves, gramatically speaking, the use of the double negative. By saying 'I don't know nothing,' technically you are saying 'I know something.' Two negatives, as it were, make a positive—as in mathematics.

"When I finally figured out that Bennie had been a student of mine, I gave him credit for knowing exactly what he was saying. If I taught him," Professor Thurman added parenthetically, "he would have remembered. Apparently, he knew something, but it was something that he could only get across to us privately and without making it seem to his companions that he wanted to talk behind their backs. That, of course," the professor said with compassion, "wouldn't have looked good at all."

"Clever, didn't I tell you?" said Glover to Sergeant Meehan. The lieutenant placed an arm confidentially around Professor Thurman's shoulder and indicated the way to his office. "Shall we talk a bit about your book now, Professor?" he suggested in a friendly manner. "About underworld lingo, you said?"

Sergeant Meehan shook his head. "Bennie was lucky you just happened to be here, Professor," he said in farewell.

Professor Thurman turned back momentarily. "Actually, it's rather strange, Sergeant," he replied. "I came here to learn something about slang. But as it turned out, Bennie was lucky mainly because"—and here his eye twinkled—"we both spoke the same language."

A tale of modern India—

LAND of the VEDAS

by Leticia V. Ramos

I WANTED some really good Indian silk for a dress, and so went to a shop in Old Delhi that had been recommended to me. On the floor, with his legs so arranged that the soles of the bare feet were uppermost, sat the owner himself—a short stout man, with a red pimply face and small sucking-pig's eyes. The clothes he had on—muslin shirt and thin *dhoti*—displayed his body as through a mirror. It was hairy as a bear's. Seeing me, he rotated on his axis, and smiled on one side of his bibulous face. Then, in a squeaky voice, he uttered: "Welcome, Memsahib, welcome. Perhaps you want some silk?"

"Yes."

"Of what sort, if I may venture to ask?"

"Indian, if you please."

"To be sure, to be sure. It is a pleasure. Just step in. There, there!" he said, indicating a tall iron chair. "Hey, boy," he added, turning to his assistant, who was sitting on his heels in a corner plunged in thought. "Hey, boy, up, up. Bring down some silks, the best we have," and then, as though exhausted, he lay back among the cushions and sighed heavily.

"What for you want the silk?" he asked, after helping himself to a pinch of snuff.

I told him.

He beamed for no apparent reason. "But for you visitors and the English, who are visitors who never seem to leave, we should be nowhere."

"Why, don't the people buy silk these days?" I asked.

"Oh, Krishna, no! Where's the money? We are becoming poorer

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and poorer. Too many mouths to feed. Only the foreigners come here, especially the Russians and the Poles, who are just crazy about our stuff. Never seen anything like it in their own countries."

Now the boy returned from an inner room, carrying a stack of silks. I looked at the various stuffs and lingered over one.

"Lovely material, that," said the shopkeeper, thrusting one plump hand into the palm of the other.

"Not bad—a trifle too heavy."

"Oh, Krishna, no!" he rejoined with thimble-rig assurance. "You don't want Japanese fabric, do you? Your *dhobi* may break his head but he won't be able to tear this cloth. Strong as steel. My grandfather made a scarf of it, and thirty years later it is still as good as new."

I raised my head, but said nothing. I began to finger another length.

"This is the very best we have. You do seem to be a connoisseur. Fit for princesses, I say. I would not even show it to an ordinary customer. No riff-raff comes here. Only the wealthy and the powerful."

"And how do you price it?"

"Only ten rupees a yard. A trifle, I assure."

[*Continued on next page*

PSORIASIS.

- PSORIASIS forms a white lustrous scale on a reddened area of skin. Both the scale and skin are always dry unless broken or brought away by too much scratching or combing. In most cases the reddened skin is of normal temperature and the scale thick and raised on the skin, especially on the scalp, elbows and knees. Where the skin is of a finer texture, as on the body, scaling takes place as thin flakes or a light powder.
- PSORIASIS may be hereditary, may occur with puberty, may follow injury, exposure, shock or worry, or may be due to faulty nutrition and faulty elimination. It may also be persistent and recurring and sufferers often despair of ever having a clear and healthy skin.
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I was about to tell him that he was asking too much when, with a violent screech of the brakes, a smart new car drew up near the door of the shop. From the cushioned depths emerged a tall gaunt woman in the early forties, with a face long and grim as a funeral procession.

"*Huzoor*, *huzoor*, this is an honour—indeed an honour," cooed the shopkeeper, managing to get up and fussing round the newcomer.

"I want some silk, the very best you have," said the woman, surveying the scene loftily.

"For the Sarkar I keep special quality, which I do not even mention to ordinary folk," murmured the shopkeeper, knowing not how to please his illustrious customer.

"Please treat me as a private individual," loudly whispered the grim-faced woman, without looking in my direction, though she knew I was there. "I don't come to see you on official business."

"Huzoor must always joke. How can the Sarkar be a private individual?" Then, seeing that there was no other chair, the shopkeeper turned to me and said: "I wish you would come some other time. Just now I am busy with the Government. She is a secretary in the Ministry of Commerce!"

I went away without a word, marvelling at the mentality of Indian shopkeepers. Did they have to abase themselves so before any petty official?

I walked on, contrasting things in my own country, the Philippines. At the end of the long lane I saw a signboard that arrested my attention. On it was written in three languages: "Silk emporium. Every kind available at cut-throat prices."

I mounted the little ladder that led into the shop. Not a soul in sight. Absolute silence. I called. No reply. A pigeon flew here, flew there, and then settled down on a rafter in the ceiling, and from there looked at me with its dull stupid eyes. I called again.

"Who is it?" barked someone.

"A customer."

"A customer! A customer!" shrilled the same voice.

A door creaked, and an elderly man, half naked, stumbled in, rubbing his eyes.

"Sit down, Memsahib, and I'll go round and call Motumal. He's just enjoying a game of dice with some friends. It's only next door. Won't be a minute. Please sit down."

I seated myself on a stool that he offered me, and looked round. The whole place was littered with cloths, mostly of a cheap and gaudy kind. I was wondering whether to stay or not, when I heard a fine cultured voice say: "So sorry to have kept you waiting. Please forgive

me. This is holiday time, and so I am taking things easy. Now what can I do to serve you?"

I expressed my wants.

"Of course. Anything you like. But won't you first have some betel-nut."

I declined the offer with thanks.

"It seems that you are not a lover of things Indian," he said a little sadly. "As for me, I am a thorough son of the soil though I have seen a good bit of the world. I have been to Malta, to Gibraltar, to Sierra Leone, to many other places; but, frankly, I do not care for foreign ways. Our own are good enough for the likes of me. . . ."

"You mean you prefer sloth to alacrity?"

"What a word to use, Memsahib! All the whites are hurrying, hurrying—whither? Have you too acquired that poor philosophy of life? You are too intelligent not to know that the most exquisite things are slow—for instance, the Spanish dance."

"What do you know about it?"

"I was in Madrid for three years, and I have spent five years in Manila, the capital of, I presume, your own country."

The man was well-travelled and intelligent.

"In London," the man went on, "they serve you in a shop with polite indifference; they don't seem to care whether you buy or not. In New York, on the other hand, they have no time for you; everybody is buying something, so your custom has little or no meaning. Here, in India, we do differently: each customer is treated as though he or she were special. Now let me offer you a cup of coffee. Don't say no, please. Hindu hospitality. I must adhere to that. Whether you buy anything or not is the least important point. I want you to go away as a friend. Hey, Tola," he called, "bring us two cups of coffee—the best spiced coffee we have."

The old man with the sleepy eyes came in and stood gazing sheepishly at his master.

"Wake up, my friend, wake up," said Motumal without a tinge of harshness. "When you join your ancestors you will have plenty of time for sleep. Now look alive, and bring us coffee."

The old man shuffled off.

"What brings you to India, this holiest of lands, if I may presume to ask?"

"Curiosity. I want to find out if the present-day people have kept the racial torch burning."

"That's a noble enterprise. To make even the first step in the right

direction, you have to do——" He paused, opened his mouth and paused again.

"What?"

"Suspend judgment. Look, hear, smell, taste and roll things, as it were, on the tongue. In due course all will become crystal-clear. Avoid like the plague the Western method—the method of comparing and contrasting. India is like no other country in the world. It is a planet apart."

"All this sounds very mysterious."

"It isn't. India is not a country or nation, but an idea."

I was fascinated by the man's remarks, and would have liked him to go on, but the old man returned with the coffee, and handed a cup to each of us. For himself, he drank from a glass, which he held wrapped in a fold of his dhoti.

The coffee was good, though a trifle too sweet. However, having finished it, I said: "May I now see some silks?"

Certainly.

Motumal rose, stroked his chin, thought a while and then disappeared. He came back with some bundles. "Here you are," he said. "Make your choice."

I looked at the materials, but did not fancy any.

"Show the Memsahib what our own Benares can produce," he said to his assistant, who was still sipping his coffee.

This time I liked one piece. We discussed the price. "I do not like higgling-haggling, Memsahib," said Motumal. "It is bad business."

"Nor do I," I said; "but I am told that you have at least two prices: one for skirts and one for saris. Now you mustn't charge me a skirt price."

"But you are wearing one," he remarked, smiling. "Why? What business has an Asian to wear a skirt? Isn't the sari good enough?"

"In my country we don't wear saris."

"What a pity!"

"Can't we wear what we like? The Chinese women don't wear saris. Nor the Japanese. Nor the Javanese. Nor . . ."

"I know; I know; but they wear their national dresses. . . ."

I was becoming impatient, so I said: "Now please state your price and have done with it."

He did. "I'm making a special concession because, after all, you are an Asian, so almost a sister. The whites pay more because they earn more. Fair?"

I gave the sum he asked for and left.

Arrived home, I undid the packet and showed it to my people

"Why, this is Japanese stuff!" I was told. "Poor material too!" On looking at the cloth more closely, I found that it was soiled in several places.

I set off at once for the bank to stop the cheque. Too late. It had been cashed! I drove over to the shopkeeper's. Noticing my car, he nodded and smiled.

"Is this the way to treat your customers?" I asked. "You have given me Japanese silk for Indian, and bad at that."

"No!" he drawled. "Not possible!"

"Have a look at the stuff yourself."

"No need to. I know what I gave you."

"What?"

"Real Benares silk. Now, Memsahib, don't be funny. No tricks with me. How can you say that I gave you Japanese silk? Not a yard of it in this place."

"Look here," I said, "you cannot get away with it like that. Better take back the stuff, or——"

"Or what?"

"I'll report the matter to the police."

He laughed. "That won't do you much good," he said. "We are no longer living under the British. We are now masters in our own house, and can do what we like."

There was nothing to do. I drove back home, a sadder and wiser girl. To judge a modern Indian by his past, or what he glibly mouths, is the greatest of heresies.

NEXT MONTH

THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE

by MICHAEL ARLEN

STRANGE RANSOM

by WENZELL BROWN

THE SQUARE ROOT OF DEATH

by Ed Lacy

SHERIFF Lew Brandy is typical of the small-town cops I've known in my 'career' as a fact crime writer. Plodding, without much imagination or ambition—but men like Brandy are long on common sense. They're also simple to the extent that (like all of us) they're pleased to see their names in print, no matter how larded the puff article.

Now, sitting beside Lew in the Harbour's only police car as he drove with expert ease through the desolate country—a homely, rough man running to middle-aged fat—I was grateful he'd let me in on the ground floor. I'd merely stopped to shout hello as I was passing through 'his' village.

Lew said in the thin, shrill voice—which was a comical contrast to his burly size, "Harry Parks, the caretaker, phoned in. A Dr. Frank Moore was shot dead early this morning. Ever hear of the doc?"

"No. Important joker?"

"I never heard of him, either, but supposed to be a big-time scientist. This is a shooting club—almost kind of a pun," Lew said with a grin showing his crooked teeth. "But according to Harry it's straight murder, not any accident. First real murder case I've had. This used to be the Barth Estate, an old run-down mansion with an oddball

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millionaire living by himself—not even a cook or maid. Anyway, when he died—years ago—the empty place went to hell—some sort of court wrangle over the estate. Then about a half a dozen years ago, six men bought the place as their private shooting and fishing club. All rich men, of course."

There was a faint note of worry in Lew's voice: tangling with wealthy men can be dangerous to the job-tenure of any village sheriff. "Harbour-men?" I asked.

"Nope, some of the men are scientists from this here atomic lab the government built out on the Point. The rest are owners of the big estates surrounding the Harbour."

"Atomic lab—think it's a spy case?"

Brandy shrugged his thick shoulders. "Naw. First off, the real famous scientist, a Dr. Ward Henry, is in Europe attending some international conference. From what Harry told me on the phone seems this Doc Moore found a sort of . . . eh . . . relic . . . in the house last night. Something they all been hunting around for. Guess that's the motive."

"A relic?"

"Yeah, some kind of old dagger. That's all I know—they found the Doc shot to death in his room, the dagger missing."

"Have you called the County Police, Lew?"

"Not yet," Brandy said slowly. "The estate is within Harbour limits—the case is mine."

We turned into a dirt road and I heard the sound of waves, smelt the salt in the air long before we saw the house. It was hardly a mansion but a rambling frame house two floors high—with an idiotic castle-like tower at one end. It still looked run-down. Behind it stood the dunes and a wild beach, probably fine for surf casting. To one side there was a skeet range; four fancy cars and a shabby pick-up truck were parked in front of the house.

The interior wasn't at all shabby, but very comfortable. Furnished with old heavy leather chairs, a few modern contemporary pieces, an expensive T.V. and stereo set which cost more than Lew made in a half a year—the whole place was warm as the giant fireplace, and very much a *man's* place.

Five men were waiting for us.

Harry Parks, the caretaker, reminded me of Sheriff Brandy; a large man with thick grey hair, bad teeth crowding his mouth; clothes neat but rough. The other four men were all in their fifties and had one thing in common: their hunting clothes were expensive—*really* expensive. Harry introduced them quickly:

Bill Winston, a pudgy little man whose fat face had once been handsome—a self-made clothing manufacturer.

A Dr. Lawrence Bloom, tall and wiry, with a sharp, tense face: quick to explain he wasn't a medical doctor, but an industrial chemist.

Pat Harris, electrical engineer: a powerfully built man with a cheerful face—the youngest man there, probably fifty.

Dr. Oliver Swanston, a medical research man—lean and sour looking, suspicious eyes.

Dr. Swanston took us upstairs to the blood-spattered bed. Dr. Moore, a thin baldy with the busted nose of an old fighter—had been shot through the heart by a 30–30 rifle at close range. The rifle was on the bloody floor. For a skinny guy, Moore certainly had bled a lot.

Glancing at the corpse, Swanston said, "We were awakened at 5.30 a.m. by the sound of a shot, found poor Frank as you see him. Quite dead, of course."

"Anybody touched the gun?" Lew asked.

"I hardly think it matters much—I mean about prints. This is a rifle from the gun rack downstairs—we've probably all handled it at some time over the week-end."

"I'm locking the room, don't want anybody in here," Lew told him. "Let's get downstairs."

"Naturally we'll co-operate in any way we can, Sheriff," Dr. Swanston said, curtly.

We returned to the others sitting before the fireplace. With a forced grin, Pat Harris, the electrical engineer said, "When does the third-degree start? Sheriff, why don't you and your deputy sit down and let me fill you in with the details of this . . . mess?"

When I explained I was a magazine writer, they were all unhappy. Winston said, "Sheriff, shouldn't have brought a reporter here. We don't want any publicity . . . all responsible businessmen who . . ."

"Don't worry about publicity," Lew grunted. "This is a murder—not a clam bake. No article will be written without my say-so. Now, Mr. Harris, you start filling me in—from the beginning."

"Yes, sir, from the top," Pat Harris said. "Being interested in shooting, some time ago we each put up $14,000, purchased this place. Generally we get together week-ends. About—oh, almost two years ago, while repairing a wall, we happened upon some letters of the former owner, Mr. Barth, who it seemed was a connoisseur of antiques. The papers we found stated his high excitement upon buying Cortez's dagger. As you can see, the weapon has travelled a long way from Mexico, in both time and distance."

"Aha," Lew grunted. Smugly, I wondered if he knew who Cortez had been. "How much was this here dagger worth?"

"It has material value, the handle is studded with precious stones. But needless to add, as a collector's item . . . it's priceless. From the letters we were certain the dagger was still hidden within the house. Whenever we were bored, we hunted for it. Whoever found it would keep it. Hank, who has been abroad for several months now, was especially keen on adding it to his collection of arms. We . . ."

"What made you think the knife was still here?" Lew cut in. "Barth died over twenty years ago."

Dr. Bloom said, "That's beside the point, Sheriff. Frank found the dagger last night—under the cellar floor. A fascinating exhibition of . . ."

"Of sheer nonsense," Dr. Swanston said abruptly. "I refuse to consider his hocus-pocus anything but pure luck. As I told him last night . . ."

"Fellows," Mr. Winston put in gently, "this is hardly the time for one of your learned bull sessions. Let Pat finish giving Sheriff Brandy all the details."

The electrical engineer nodded. "Right, Bill." Then he told Lew, "The quest for the dagger was a game we played from time to time, especially on rainy week-ends. We weren't . . . uh . . . fanatics about it, understand, but we studied building plans, often held slightly drunken discussions as to where a man like Barth—each of us having our own conception of the man—would hide anything. True, we all wanted the dagger for our own collection, but I refuse to believe any of us would murder for it or . . ."

"Now stop that line of talk," Dr. Swanston cut in. "This was obviously the work of an intruder. Any number of antique dealers throughout the world would like to have the dagger. Nor should we rule out the chance it was a petty house-breaker who happened to stumble into poor Frank's room. Nor do we know what personal enemies Frank might have . . ."

Brandy pointed a thick finger at the caretaker. "Harry, can you give me a rundown on what happened here? Start with the last time the deceased was seen alive. Now, when would that be?"

"Well, it was about . . . nine, last night, when Dr. Moore found the knife, using a divining rod. Tell you, Lew, it was real uncanny the way that rod moved—pointed directly at this spot on the floor like it was nodding at it."

"A divining rod?" Lew repeated, shrilly. "One of these bent twigs,

nuts claim they can find water with? I thought the deceased was a scientist?"

Dr. Swanston laughed—a short, brittle, bark. "Very well put, Mr. Sheriff. Frank did indeed behave like an ignorant clod—using a dowsing rod, of all things!"

"But, Ollie, it worked," Dr. Bloom said, in a mild voice.

"Exactly!" Pat Harris added. "You see, Sheriff, Frank always was full of curiosity. As he said, about eighty per cent. of the time these old water diviners actually *found* water! Last night that old coat-hanger Frank was using surely pointed out the dagger's hiding place."

"How anyone of the slightest scientific bent can believe such utter nonsense, is beyond my understanding," Swanston said.

"Ollie, you were on that same kick last night," Pat said. "I thought Frank's explanation was highly scientific." He turned to Lew and myself. "Science is in the dark on many, many things. Now it is a fact that all matter—including the body—gives off radiation. As Frank carefully explained, for some reason still unknown to science—and it may be due to the fact that thoughts give out a source of energy and radiation, too—when a person is holding a delicately balanced rod, or a pendulum, and thinking of . . . say, water, when he is actually near water the electrical discharge, or wavelength of his aura radiation, changes. This causes the muscles of the hand to sweat, or actually contract, in turn causing the rod to move. In short, it has nothing to do with any supernatural quality in the rod."

"Good Lord, Pat, as an engineer, how can you believe such damn nonsense?" Swanston asked. "Really, I . . ."

The engineer laughed. "As Frank told you last night, with all your knowledge medical men still cannot adequately explain the miracle of birth! As the great Carrel said, '. . . we willingly believe that facts which cannot be explained by current theories, do not exist.' I . . ."

"Hold everything," Brandy cut in. "Last night Dr. Moore found the dagger; then what happened?"

"Naturally we were excited about finding it," Winston, the manufacturer, said. "It was covered with layers of dust and dirt, but there was no doubting it was the Cortez dagger. Frank wrapped it in a handkerchief, took it up to his room. You see, Sheriff, with rare objects, one must be very careful in cleaning and handling them. He was going to take it to his lab today. Then all the scientific brains here, which left out myself and Harry, held a furious debate about energy and human radiation, things far over my head. I never even finished high school, I regret to say. It was nearly midnight when we finally retired to our rooms. Next I was awakened by the sound of a shot. I rushed

out into the upstairs hall—it was still dark—and met the others. We were all there, except Frank. We went to his room . . . well, he was dead."

Brandy nodded. "O.K., that was 5.30 a.m. Then what did you do?"

"Dressed and ran out of the house," Bloom told him, "to find the killer, or killers. We split up, each covering a part of the grounds and woods. It was about 8 a.m. when I returned. Bill had come in a few minutes before. Then Harry showed. I suggested he phone you. It was about 8.30 a.m. before Pat and Ollie returned. In the meantime, Bill and I went to Frank's room, looked for the dagger—it was missing."

"Why did you go to his room?" Lew asked.

Bloom shrugged. "I don't really know. I suppose we each realized the dagger had to be the motive. At least I was sure of it. I knew Frank better than the others. He lived a quiet life—few friends, no women—his wife had died several years ago. Frank was a dedicated man, lived only for his work."

Brandy sighed again. "When you went to look for the killer, were you armed?"

"Certainly," Dr. Swanston said. "Hardly expect us to chase a killer unarmed. We took guns from the racks."

"During the night, did any of you hear a noise, like somebody taking the murder weapon from the racks?"

As they shook their heads, the caretaker said, "That's what puzzles me, Lew. You know I've always been a light sleeper. My bed is down here, off this room. I didn't hear a thing. The doors and windows weren't locked, but I would have heard a door opening, or the gun being removed from the rack."

"Last night, did you go to your rooms at the same time?"

"Yes," Bloom said, "give or take a minute. We finished our drinks and retired—sober. Sheriff, while I know it's your job to suspect us, I must say it's preposterous to think any one of us would do Frank in, much as we wanted the dagger. Collecting antiques is merely a hobby with us, not a passion."

Brandy rubbed his fat nose, asked where the phone was. The caretaker took him into the kitchen. I followed. When the kitchen door closed, Lew whispered, "Harry, you're a Harbourman, one of us, were all those jokers telling the truth? You suspect any of them?"

"No, I don't suspect them. They told it straight. After Doc Moore found the dagger, they had this long argument about dowsing rods, lot of scientific talk I couldn't understand. I went to my bed, but I heard them gassing. Then, when they went upstairs, I got up to clean the glasses, went back to the sack."

Brandy phoned his office, telling his one deputy to get Dr. Carr out to the house. I gathered Carr was the Harbour's single doctor, therefore also the coroner.

Lew stared at the phone as he put it down. I knew what he was thinking—he'd have to call in County Homicide, admit the case was too big for him. For a few minutes there was only silence in the kitchen, then Harry asked, "I was making sandwiches when you drove up, Lew. Be O.K. if I serve lunch? We ain't eaten since last night."

Lew nodded. When Harry left with a tray of food, I said, "Lew, you'd best call the FBI, along with the County. You'll need plenty of expert police lab work on this. Half the time I didn't even know what those guys were talking about. You're in over your head here."

"I don't think so. I would be if I was discussing science with 'em, but crime is *my* field. I have a working motive, the weapon, a group of suspects . . . and the damn silly fact every one of them left the scene of the crime, meaning the killer had plenty of time to hide the best piece of evidence—the dagger! Of course, I could have them all searched, shake down their homes. . . ."

His voice died. Again, I could almost read his mind: if he did investigate them and didn't come up with stand-up evidence, Lew'd have four influential wheels on his back. For many seconds Lew just stood there, lost in thought, rubbing his thick fingers together as if they were sticky.

"What's next?" I finally asked. There wasn't a thing Lew could do but yell for County help.

"I don't know, exactly. Way I see it, no great rush. True, I could snoop around Doc Moore's house, learn his friends and enemies. Possible the dagger had nothing to do with the killing. And Doc Carr can come up with a clue when he does the autopsy. But my best hunch says the murderer is one of the five men in this house, so I think I'll waste an hour or so around here, see what breaks. Let's go back to the others."

I was slightly astonished: police officers like Brandy are the dogged type, solve crime by digging away—never by going for cute. To me there seemed a lot of big questions to be answered. Like: Why hadn't the killer used the dagger on Moore instead of awakening the whole house with a gun blast? Or . . . ?

I followed Lew into the living-room where the five men were sitting around the rough table, which probably doubled in brass for poker games, too, slowly eating thick roast beef sandwiches, sipping mugs of coffee. A democratic group—Harry Parks was eating with his employers. They offered us sandwiches and to my surprise, Lew accepted.

We sat around like one happy family, the only sounds being those of chewing, until Dr. Swanston asked, "Sheriff, I realize we're sure to be involved in some . . . eh . . . red tape, but can you possibly give me an idea how long all this will take? I'm due to read a paper in San Francisco next week."

"Can't set no timetable on a murder," Brandy told him. "But nobody leaves this house, much less the Harbour, until I say so. Another thing; Harry, take the ammo out of every gun in the house, including pistols, and lock the shells and guns in a closet. But don't touch the murder gun. Any guns missing, let me know," Lew added, reaching for another sandwich.

Harry nodded: mouth full of rare roast beef.

Bill Winston, the clothing man, said, "Sheriff, I hope you're not responsible for setting men's styles back an entire season. Which will be the case, if I don't reach Rome for the spring fashion shows this week. I . . ." Winston suddenly coughed. "Bet I caught a cold running around in the morning dampness. Ollie, want to use a divining rod to see if I have the germs?" He winked at the others.

"Please, don't spoil my meal with such bunk," Dr. Swanston said, glaring over his steaming coffee mug.

"Of course, while I understood little of the scientific big words being tossed around last night," Winston went on, "didn't Frank claim this human aura business could be used to detect illness?"

"That's right," Bloom told him. "Frank said a diseased organ gives out a different radiation length from a healthy one, and in time the study of the aura will be more important than the X-ray for every doctor."

"Merely a wild theory!" Swanston said, annoyed.

"And as Frank told you last night, flying was a wild theory before the Wright brothers, and thirty years ago few scientists believed in atomic energy," Pat Harris said, baiting the doctor.

Winston lit a cigar, held one out to Brandy, who turned it down. Lighting his rope, the manufacturer said, "Perhaps the good Sheriff ought to add a divining rod to his police equipment. It found the dagger, perhaps it can point out the killer."

"It probably could, if the killer was in this room," Harris said, opening his hunting vest, lighting his pipe. "I'm willing to submit to a 'murder dowsing.' "

"Me, too," Winston added, "if it would speed up the investigation. Let's try it."

Brandy said, "Might be an idea. Anybody got a bent twig?"

I couldn't believe my big ears—Lew was grasping at wild straws!

Lew was a 'good' cop and I was puzzled at the lengths he was going to avoid calling in the County police. Lew's being a glory hound was a new side of him I'd never seen before.

"Come now, this is sheer nonsense," Swanston said. "You'd be laughed out of any court in the land with that sort of evidence."

"Perhaps," Brandy said, opening his coat, letting out a notch in his wide belt with a sigh—or it could have been a small belch. "But you fellows claim it located the dagger, and if it narrows the list of suspects, be a help, save time. Where's the dowsing twig Dr. Moore used last night?"

"Not a stick but a metal hanger," Winston said. "I'm for trying it—be interesting, if nothing else."

Bloom stood up. "I'll get a hanger."

"I, for one, will not submit to any such damned foolishness!" Swanston announced, pushing his coffee mug away.

"Purely as a scientific experiment, I fail to see what possible harm it can do," Pat Harris said. "I'm for it."

Harry, who had been removing the guns from the racks, taking out the shells, called from across the room, "All the guns are here, except for the one upstairs. O.K. if I lock 'em in the tool chest, Lew?"

"Fine."

Bloom, the chemist, brought an ordinary wire hanger from the closet, handed it to Lew. "The idea is to hold it rigidly between your hands, but perfectly balanced, so it has freedom of motion."

Holding the ends of the hanger in his big hands, Brandy asked, "You mean all I do is point the hook—at each of you?"

Harris, the electrical engineer, reached over to touch the hanger. "Haven't balanced it yet. There—now you have it. Remember, your mind must be concentrating on only one thing—*the killer*."

Lew stood up. "Let's give it a whirl. Rest of you form a half-circle in front of me. You too, Harry."

"I will take no part in this idiotic exercise," Dr. Swanston said. "You'll be consulting a crystal ball next!"

"That's up to you, Doctor. I'm not forcing anybody to do this," Lew said slowly. "But I might as well tell you—everybody is going to remain here until Dr. Carr, of the Harbour, performs an autopsy on the corpse, and my deputy dusts Dr. Moore's room for prints. Going to take several hours at least."

The others formed a rough circle before Brandy. He motioned to me, "Join the line."

"*Me?*"

"Why not?" Brandy asked. "If the hanger points at you, be proof it's a phony."

"Well . . ." I began, then shut up, joined the others. I found myself shaking a little. Harry Parks was sweating, the others seemed casual but I sensed their tenseness under everything.

Dr. Swanston suddenly stood up—a weary movement. "I suppose I'll join this childish exhibition. You'll be reading tea leaves next, Sheriff."

Pat Harris reached out and barely touched the hanger with the tip of his finger. It moved. "Very good, Sheriff, you have the touch of an old water diviner." He tapped the hanger back to a horizontal position. "I think we're ready."

The silence in the room was so clear I could hear two things: the sound of the waves on the beach outside . . . and the fast beat of my heart. Brandy walked to within a few inches of Harry Parks, pointed the hanger at him. It didn't move. Harry grinned weakly.

Lew pointed it at me. My heart jumped: the hanger didn't. Then he pointed it at Winston, at Harris, Bloom. Swanston was the last one—damn if the hanger didn't dip sharply, like it was fingering the doctor!

The others gasped; Swanston went pale, tried to say something but obviously his mouth was cotton-dry. Lew held the hanger up higher, and again the hook dipped towards Swanston. The doctor jumped back, seemed about to run. Dropping the hanger Lew moved with cat-speed, grabbed Swanston by his hunting vest. "Doc, don't try anything foolish!"

"I—I refuse to indulge in this. . . . I demand a . . . !"

"Shut up!" Brandy grunted. "Hold your hands over your head." He quickly frisked the doctor. "Give me your vest."

"I've had enough of this damn nonsense! I demand a . . ."

"Damnit, stop talking and take off your vest!" Brandy said, stepping back as if covering the rest of us.

Swanston removed his red vest and tossed it at Lew. The sheriff felt it, suddenly pulled out his penknife, started ripping the vest apart. A moment later he held up four little metal bars, about an inch long and a quarter of an inch in thickness.

"What are those?" Swanston asked.

Brandy lifted one with the tip of his knife. "Magnets. You've been framed, Doc. Somebody, figuring we'd try this dowsing bit, sewed magnets into your clothing. Harry, look in your kitchen, should find a couple of pot-holders missing, or sewed up." Lew moved towards Bill Winston. "I'm booking you on suspicion of murder, sir."

"Me?" Winston yelled, his cigar falling from his lips. "Are you

crazy? What do I know about magnets and radiation, stuff like that? Harry and I are the only ones who couldn't be in on all this, never had a college education like the others!"

"Nope, you've convicted yourself, Mr. Winston. These magnets were *expertly* sewn into the vest lining. Calls for a tailor's skill, and you're the *only* one here with that!"

Winston stared at Brandy with startled, big eyes, then fainted.

Later in the afternoon, after Winston had finally confessed, even dug up the dagger for Brandy, Lew put his big feet up on his old office desk, yawned, told me, "Well, writer, not bad for a hick sheriff—solving a murder in less than a day."

"Come off it, Lew, tell me true: didn't you suspect Winston from the jump?"

"Yes and no. I knew he was a big collector, with Picassos and other valuable paintings in his house. His insurance company wrote me that years ago, when Winston first moved out here. Of course, the others could have been collecting nuts, too, for all I knew. Main thing was, I was darn certain it wasn't the work of an outsider. The gun told me that."

"The gun—how?"

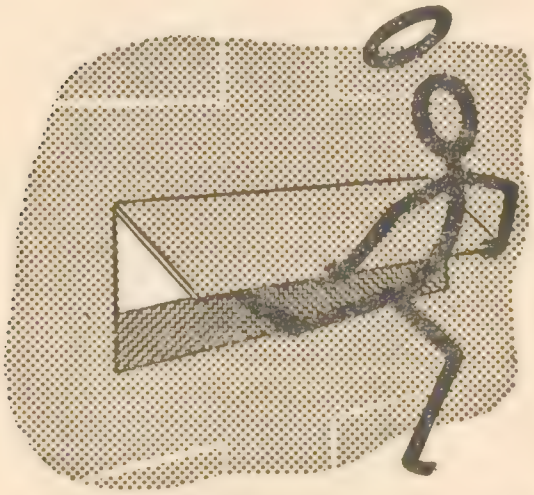
"If you're busting into a house and expect to use a gun, you *come* armed. Also, Harry *is* a light sleeper, would have heard an intruder. Another thing: supposing it had been an unarmed housebreaker who was surprised by Dr. Moore? He would have tried to clout the Doc with a chair or something, or even used the dagger. But Winston *had* to use a gun, make certain Moore was dead—*if* Moore woke up while Winston was searching his room. Of course I'll pin a premeditated murder *one* on him because *Winston took the gun from the rack when he went to his room that night*—hid it under his jacket for just such an emergency. Which is why Harry Parks didn't hear anybody come downstairs for the gun. And while the others were running about the grounds, looking for the killer, Winston doubled back, sewed the magnets into Swanston's vest. Magnets in pot-holders . . . common thing today, makes them stick to the stove and sink. Turned out they were a bit too handy for Winston."

"Such a far-fetched idea," I said. "How could Winston have been sure you'd go for the divining routine?"

"He couldn't, but remember Winston was the one who suggested we try dowsing. You see, he's an amateur crook and was thinking like one."

"But he must have known it wouldn't have stood up in court? What did he hope to gain by the divining act?"

Lew sighed. "Probably time, to get the hell out of the country—which also would have been a stupid move. I told you, let the suspects play around and one of them would be sure to stumble. They were all big apples in their own fields, but crime is *my* business . . . and writer, believe me, the amateur killer is an awful dumb character!"



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THE MIRROR OF YIN TANG

A MURDER MYSTERY SET IN AN ENIGMATIC LAND

by

Charlotte and

Dan Ross

AS the ancient taxi hurtled through the maze of traffic in Bombay's busy streets its single passenger eyed the native driver with some alarm on his broad face and edged precariously near the rim of the back seat.

Mei Wong, the venerable Chinese art dealer, had never accustomed himself to the frantic driving habits of the Indian city. Although he had lived in Bombay since the end of World War II he rarely used taxis. But this afternoon it was an emergency that had made him break a set habit. He was supposed to be at his studio to meet Inspector Bannerjee of the Bombay Homicide Department at four o'clock. An overlong interview at the home of a client had kept him later than he expected and it was almost four now.

He had told the driver he was in a hurry and he now realized this had been a major error. From time to time the immaculately white-suited old man dabbed at his forehead with a linen handkerchief and fanned himself with the broad panama he held in his other hand.

Bracing his massive body as they turned a sharp corner into the wide avenue that led to the Imperial Hotel where he had his studio, Mei Wong flinched as they managed a narrow channel between a clanging streetcar and a creaking bullock cart. The hot afternoon was filled with the clamour of blatting horns, the sonorous rhythm of voices in many languages and a continuous barrier of pedestrians.

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Finally the taxi stopped in front of the Imperial Hotel and the beaming driver opened the door for Mei Wong to rather shakily emerge. Feeling it useless and perhaps even ungrateful to lecture the self-satisfied young man for his reckless driving, he paid him and trotted quickly into the peace and shadowed quiet of the hotel's lobby.

Quickly taking the elevator to the fifth floor he hurried down the thickly carpeted corridor to his studio. Standing in front of the door was a tall ascetic-looking man with a short black beard.

Hurrying up to him Mei Wong extended his hand with a smile. "I am sorry to be late, Inspector Bannerjee. I hope you have not been waiting long."

The inspector shook hands and returned the smile. "I had only just arrived."

Inside the big room which housed Mei Wong's Bombay Art and Curio Shop and which was filled with treasures of jade, china, precious silks and tapestries, the two men seated themselves.

Inspector Bannerjee, who sat in front of Mei Wong's broad mahogany desk, frowned at the art dealer. "I hoped you might be able to help me, Mei Wong. I'm puzzled. Charles Simpson wasn't the type to commit suicide. Yet he deliberately walked off that cliff to his death."

For a moment Mei Wong casually studied a tooled-leather book which was before him and which contained a number of entries in small, precise handwriting. Then he looked up at the inspector.

He spoke quietly, his moon-face quite expressionless. "What makes you think I can clear the mystery?"

"Because you were there when it happened," the inspector said. "His house guest, weren't you?"

"Yes." Mei Wong folded his hands on his ample stomach. "I was cataloguing some oriental art pieces he'd just purchased."

"You must have noticed something about his manner to explain what happened." The dark, ascetic face of the inspector was shrewdly studying in its expression. "The rumour he was a suicide has sent his company shares tumbling."

"Most unfortunate for his stockholders," Mei Wong commented.

"Unless the situation is cleared a lot of innocent people may be ruined."

Mei Wong looked thoughtful. "Strangely enough I think Simpson was murdered. But I very much doubt if we can prove it to the satisfaction of your department, Inspector."

"Anything will be helpful." Inspector Bannerjee leaned forward. "Just what do you know?"

Mei Wong picked up an elaborately carved ivory letter opener from

his desk and held it in his hands. After a moment's deliberation he asked: "You remember Sheila Trent?"

The inspector sat back in his chair again. "Yes, of course. She was Simpson's secretary for nearly a year before her suicide."

"That is correct," Mei Wong agreed. "I believe it was poison."

"Quite right," the dark man nodded. "It's been two years since the unhappy episode of Sheila Trent. I'd hoped the newspapers would have forgotten. But now they're dragging the story out again and trying to link it somehow with the death of Simpson."

"But of course the link is rather fascinating," Mei Wong pointed out. "As I recall she was a most attractive girl. Simpson hired her as his confidential secretary. It seems she fell in love with him, as sometimes happens in these cases. Simpson led her on and she broke her engagement to the nice young man whom she'd planned to marry. But the millionaire had a streak of cruel, arrogant ruthlessness, and one day he told Sheila he was no longer interested. That there would be no marriage. The poor girl was so let down she made the dreadful decision to take her own life. No wonder the Bombay foreign colony chose to shun Simpson after that."

Inspector Bannerjee shrugged. "Sheila Trent was ill-prepared to take care of herself in the situation. I was on the case and probed into her background. She'd only been in India a short time. She came out from England after her mother's death. Her father was a small-time vaudeville performer she hadn't heard from in years. So there were no relatives to take an interest in what happened to her."

"Making her easy prey for a man of Simpson's type," Mei Wong sighed. "I didn't admire him although we did business over a long period. He was a leading collector of oriental art and let no scruples stand in his way of acquiring whatever took his fancy. I was not happy about going to his home to do appraisals on a new lot of purchases but it was difficult to refuse. I had helped locate the pieces in Hong Kong."

"And you were staying at his villa on the outskirts of the city when it happened," the inspector said. "It would help if you can recall anything or anyone of unusual interest."

"It was all very ordinary. Although I did take a fancy to one of Simpson's staff and had some interesting chats with him. A man called Furness, the head gardener."

"What about him?"

"Rather a strange man. Simpson had hired him only a few months ago. He had a positive genius with the grounds and a surprising

knowledge about Simpson's art collection. He told me he'd come across a few good items himself at one period."

Inspector Bannerjee registered interest. "Can you recall the exact conversations you had?"

"Some of them," the art collector stared off into space a moment. "I remember one afternoon in particular. We talked. I said that I considered him something of a specialist in my field."

"I've had good stuff," Furness agreed with a strange one-sided smile. "Sold it whenever I needed cash. Only have one piece left that's worth anything. A silver mirror by Yin Tang. I'll dig it out of my trunk and have you tell me what it's worth."

Mei Wong glanced at the inspector. "Of course I told him I'd be delighted. Would buy it if we could agree on its value. The following day when I was working alone in the study the old man stepped in through the half-opened french doors and brought me the mirror. It was about four inches in diameter and of sparkling silver. The back inlaid with leaves of turquoise. I told him it was extremely valuable and asked if he wanted to sell it."

"And what was his attitude?"

"He came to no direct decision. But he moved across to the french windows and stared out at the lawn where Simpson was taking an afternoon stroll. And then he turned to me and said: 'I may sell it later. I want to let Mr. Simpson look at it first. I think now might be a good time.' I watched as the old man went out and walked towards Simpson."

Inspector Bannerjee smiled wryly. "No need to say he could have gotten a better deal from you."

Mei Wong nodded. "I didn't expect that Simpson would offer the old fellow anything like what it was worth. I watched the two men in the bright sunlight as they talked about the piece. Even at the distance I could see the mirror glistening as the gardener dangled it before Simpson's greedy eyes. And somehow I felt it was a scene I'd encountered before."

"What did it make you recall?"

"It wasn't clear to me, just vaguely familiar. Then Simpson walked away from the gardener and disappeared out of sight in the direction of the path that led to the cliff. That was the last time I saw him alive. Minutes later two panic-stricken natives rushed up to the terrace with word that Simpson had vanished over the cliff. As they told it he'd deliberately walked over the edge to his death. They found his broken body on the rocks below."

The inspector's keen eyes met those of Mei Wong. "You've still given me nothing that will help."

Mei Wong bent forward across his desk. "I understand Furness is no longer gardener at the estate."

"No. He's left the country altogether."

"He gave me a present before he left." The art dealer rose and moved across to one of the treasure-filled shelves at the opposite side of the room and came back with an exquisitely wrought silver mirror. "The Mirror of Yin Tang," he said.

"Furness was generous indeed to make you such a valuable gift." The inspector raised his eyebrows.

Mei Wong held the mirror before him and studied its delicate pattern. "He said he wanted me to have it. That it was no longer of any use to him." The old Chinese paused and then went on: "After he'd gone I thought of the afternoon I'd watched him and Simpson on the lawn together as they'd discussed the mirror. And it was then I remembered what the scene had reminded me of."

The art dealer went over to his desk and opening a top drawer took out a wrinkled section of newspaper. "This was wrapped around some material I received from a dealer in Australia the other day. As I unfolded it an advertisement caught my eye. And then I knew that my suspicions were correct."

Inspector Bannerjee took the paper and read the advertisement with its black border. The heading said: "Hypnotist Extraordinary! One Week Only!" Underneath it was a photograph of the man he'd known as Furness. He glanced up at Mei Wong with disbelief: "Are you suggesting that this Furness hypnotized Simpson and made him plunge to his death."

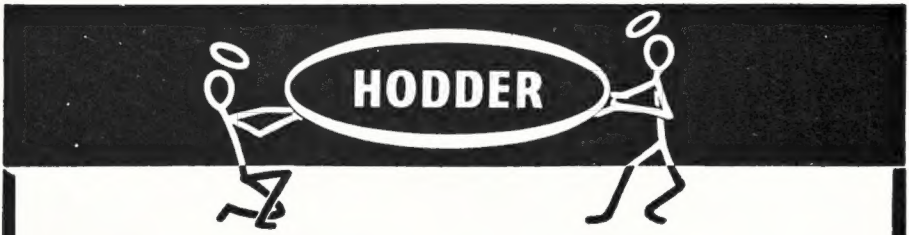
Mei Wong inclined his head and said quietly. "I'm sure of it. It was the unusual way he held the mirror, the way he used it before Simpson's eyes as they talked. I'd seen it done before. It is a favourite means of focussing the attention of a hypnotic subject."

The inspector stood. "But what was the motive for Furness to do such a thing?"

"You haven't finished with the advertisement," Mei Wong pointed to the newspaper. "In smaller print you will see the hypnotist's name—Stephen Trent!"

Bannerjee stared at the paper. "Of course, the father! The small-time vaudeville actor."

"Yes. Sheila's father." Mei Wong put his slender hands on the polished surface of his desk. "Your department can easily confirm that. But for the rest, I'm afraid you will find it quite impossible to prove."



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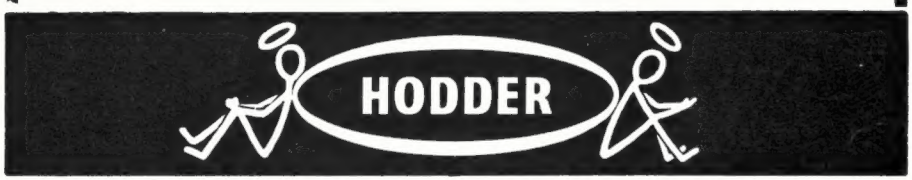

3 STEPS TO SUCCESS

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